THE MIND OF EARLY AMERICAN METHODISM: 1800-1844

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INDEX

Affections, 144
  sanctified, 196
  weaned, 195
Age of enlightenment, 2, 4ff., 14, 26, 31
Age of Methodism, xx
American context, xxiii, xxiv, chap. i
American Revolutionary War, 2ff.
Arminianism, liberal, 5
Assurance, 160ff.
Atonement, 92-108
  conditional benefits of, chap. iii
  governmental view, 95, 104ff., 209f.
  manifestation of God's love, 108f.
  satisfaction, 94f., 100ff., 209f.
  unconditional benefits of, 82
  universality of, 108ff.

Calvinism, 28, 30, 36ff., 57., 71f.
  Consistent, 36ff., 76, 78
  New Haven School, 36, 39ff., 72f.
  Old School, 36ff.
Chalcedonian formula, 89f.
Christian education, 189ff.
Christian experience, chap. iv
Christian life, chap. iv
  inward holiness, 164-182
  outward holiness, 183-206
  separation from the world, 194ff.

Deism, 4, 6ff., 28, 29
Determinism, 20

Edwardeans, see Consistent Calvinists
  on atonement, 95
  on freedom of the will, 61ff.
Emotionalism, overt manifestations of, 156-160
Emotions, 17f.
Experience, xxiii, 23, 64f., 167-182
Experimental religion, 164-182

Faculties, 49, 69, 70ff., 77, 78, 80, 132, 144f.
Faculty psychology, language of, 74ff., 129f., 144f., 212
Faith, 124, 128-134
  as a gift of God, 134

    assent, 128, 130
    consent, 129, 130
    trust, 128, 130
Family religion, 189ff.
Free moral agency, 47ff., 54, 56, 59-66, 120f.
Freedom, 17
    of the will, 61ff.
Frontier, 2, 11ff.
Fundamental doctrines, 53, 154

God, 54ff., 59
    Moral Governor, 54ff.
    sovereign decrees, 54, 55
Grace, 114
    growth in, 178ff.
    means of, 180ff.
    optimism of, 19
    prevenient grace, 50, 76-82, 122, 127f.
    salvation by grace, 114ff.
    universality of, 122

Holiness, see Sanctification
    of heart, 146-151, 174-177
    of life, 183-206
Holy Spirit, 115
    agent of regeneration, 116ff., 119f., 138, 143, 153
Hopkinsianism, 71

Individual, 5, 14, 15f., 21

Jesus Christ, 24, 83
    adoration of, 24
    deity, 83-89
    humanity, 89
    two natures, 89f.
    work of, see Atonement
Justification, 141ff.

Liberal theology, 31, 98
    criticism of traditional orthodoxy, 30f.
    on atonement, 96f.
    on sin and depravity, 38ff.

Man as free moral agent, 59-68
Message, evangelical, 19, chap. iii
    social implications of, 204
Mind, xxi, xxii
Monergism, 122
Moral government, 55ff.

Nature, 18f., 25f.

Ordo Salutis, 113, 134-151

  conversion, 139-146, 171-174
  conviction, 136-139, 167-171
  sanctification, 146-151, 174-177
Original righteousness, 74
Original sin, see Sin

Patristic writings, 87
  Methodism's use of, 88ff.
Pelagianism, 42, 122f
Polemic evangelicalism, 28ff., 43f., 51f.
Popular evangelicalism, 19f., 21, 24
Practical religion, 183-206
Prayer, 181f.
Preaching, 22, 152-156
Predestination, 57
  Fisk on predestination, 57f.
Puritan evangelicalism, 19f., 21, 24

Redemption, 114f.
Regeneration, 40f., 143-146
Repentance, 123-128
Romantic communication, 22f., 155f.
Romantic evangelicalism, 20ff., 27f., 51f., 176, 207, 212f., 214
Romanticism, era of, 14ff., 19, 26, 202, 207

Sacraments, xxii, 180
Sanctification, 146-151, 174-177
  Christian perfection, 147ff.
  instantaneous and progressive, 146
Scottish Common Sense Philosophy, 43-48, 63-65
Sin, 38, 66, 68ff.
  depravity, 38ff., 69f., 73ff., 81, 211
  guilt, 40, 68ff., 211
  original, 66ff.
Social awareness, 201-206
Synergism, 50, 118f., 122f.

Theology, Methodist, xxii, chap. ii
Transcendentalism, 15, 19f.

Unitarianism, 5, 6, 28, 29, 84, 89, 92
Universalism, 28, 30, 32ff., 42, 84, 89, 92

Works, 188ff.
  authenicate faith, 162, 183
  faith and, 185ff.
  issue from faith, 184f.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
BIBLIOGRAPHY	vii
PREFACE	xx
I. AMERICAN METHODISM AND THE AMERICAN CONTEXT	1
II. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS	53
III. THE MESSAGE OF EARLY AMERICAN METHODISM	112
IV. RELIGION - EXPERIMENTAL AND PRACTICAL	164
CONCLUSION	208

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PREFACE

The nineteenth century in American Christianity has been cited as the "age of Methodism." Interestingly enough, it was a Presbyterian who first made the observation. In his book, A History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Robert E. Thompson commented that the Great Awakening "terminated the Puritan [age] and inaugurated...the Methodist [age] of American church history."[1] More recently this idea has been underscored by Winthrop S. Hudson[2] and C.C. Goen.[3] Counter to these judgments has been the rather widespread tendency to discredit Methodism as a significant theological force. This, in part, has been an attitude encouraged by Methodism's own estimate of its tradition.[4] It has been commonly claimed that Methodism is not a doctrinal church. The concern of early American Methodism to reform the land militated against the expenditure of energies in other areas, such as theological formulations. According to Matthew Arnold, the significance of Methodism has been undercut by its tendency to appeal to a "mind of the third order."[5] In his appraisal of the American religious tradition, William M. Horton concluded that "the American tradition is...mainly conditioned by the two remaining forms of original Protestantism: the Calvinists and the Anabaptist or sectarian."[6] This position bespeaks a gross disregard for the contribution of Methodism to the American religious tradition.

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[1] Robert E. Thompson, A History of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, The American Church History Series, IV (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1895), 34.

[2] Winthrop S. Hudson, American Protestantism (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), pp. 97,99,103.

[3] C.C. Goen, "The 'Methodist Age' in American Church History," Religion in Life, XXXIV (1965), 562-572.

[4] See Leland Scott, "Introduction," "Methodist Theology in America in the Nineteenth Century," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1954.

There have been numerous institutional histories tracing the expansion of Methodism in America[7] and throughout the world.[8] Further, attention has been given to and reasons offered for the phenomenal growth of Methodism in America.[9] However, the Methodist mind as a concrete expression of religious life and thought has not been fully appreciated. Recent studies have made an effort to correct this. Both

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[5] Matthew Arnold, Civilization in the United States (Boston: De Wolfe, Fiske, and Company, 1888), p. 87.

[6] William M. Horton, "Systematic Theology," Protestant Thought in the Twentieth Century, ed. by Arnold S. Nash (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1951), p. 106.

[7] Nathan Bangs, A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 4 vols. (New York: Mason and Lane, 1839-1840; Lane and Sandford, 1841; Lane and Tippett, 1845); Abel Stevens, History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 4 vols. (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1864-1867); William W. Sweet, Methodism in American History (rev. ed.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953).

[8] Wade C. Barclay, The History of Methodist Missions, 3 vols. (New York: The Board of Missions of the Methodist Church, 1949-1957).

[9] Wesley Gewehr, "Some Factors in the Growth of Methodism," Journal of Religion, VIII (1928), 98-120; Sweet, Methodism in American History.

Leland Scott[10] and Wade Barclay[11] have considered the message of early American Methodism, focusing on some of the basic essentials. The specific doctrine of Christian Perfection and the concept of the Sacraments have been studied by John Peters[12] and Paul Sanders,[13] respectively. Each author has examined his subject matter in its transition from English to American soil, noting the original Wesleyan understanding and the modifications that resulted in the new environment. The most exhaustive studies of Methodist theology in nineteenth century America have been done by Leland Scott[14] and Robert Chiles.[15] Scott, as well as Chiles, however, centered, for the most part, on figures who were prominent in the last half of the century.

The first half of the nineteenth century remains a neglected area of study. It is contended that this is a critical period.[16] During these years not only was Methodism growing at an exponential rate, but its character was also taking shape. While there was no formal systematic statement of theology in this period, patterns were developing which anticipated the course of theology throughout the century. Furthermore, the essence of Methodism is more than an expression of its theological formulations. Inherent in Methodism is its concern for experience. Dogma must give way to experience. This aspect of Methodism, as well as the emergence of its incipient theological character, was witnessed in the early nineteenth century, and both determined the direction which Methodism was to take in the years to come.

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[10] Leland Scott, "The Message of Early American Methodism," *The History of American Methodism*, ed. by Emory S. Bucke, I (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1964), 291-359.

[11] Barclay, *The History of Methodist Missions*, Part One, *Early American Methodism, 1769-1844*, II (1950), 373-417.

[12] John L. Peters, *Christian Perfection and American Methodism* (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956).

[13] Paul S. Sanders, "An Appraisal of John Wesley's Sacramentalism in the Evolution of Early American Methodism," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Union Theological Seminary, 1954.

[14] Scott, "Methodist Theology in America in the Nineteenth Century," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation.

[15] Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965).

This present study represents an effort to examine and interpret the mind[17] of Methodism in the historical context of nineteenth century America. A fundamental presupposition of this study is that the mind or thought of any movement cannot be completely understood or fully appreciated apart from the life and thought of the world and time in which it thrives. Hence, a proper examination of early American Methodism must take into account the American scene at the close of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. This is not to disregard the Wesleyan heritage of American Methodism, nor is it to imply that Methodism has been fully determined by the American context. It is to contend, however, that while American Methodism represents an extension of the Wesleyan tradition into a new nation, the latter has been a conditioning factor upon the character of Methodism. The period covered is marked off by the beginnings of the Second Great Awakening around 1800 and the division of the Methodist Episcopal Church over the question of slavery in 1844. Concurrent with the advent of the Second Great Awakening was the rise of a more indigenous voice within American Methodism. The missionaries sent by John Wesley to America had returned to England during the Revolutionary War, and at the close of the century a strong core of native American ministers had joined together in the

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[16] Richard Wolf has observed that one cannot fully appreciate the development of American Christianity if he fails to take into serious consideration its life and thought during the "middle period," i.e., from 1800-1870. This period, he noted, was particularly significant for the understanding of the development of American Methodism. Richard Wolf, "The Middle Period, 1800-1870: The Matrix of Modern American Christianity," Religion in Life, XXII (1953), 74f.

[17] The term, mind, is meant to convey the idea of the general character of early American Methodism. As noted in the above text, there was no systematic statement of theology written during the period under consideration. Yet, there were present in the writings dominant ideas and basic concepts which reflect a general consensus or mind. However, to speak of the Methodist mind in terms of theological consensus alone represents a failure to embrace the essence of Methodism in its entirety, and hence, must not be understood as exhausting what is here intended by the word, mind. Methodism focused its attention upon experience, i.e., an experienced relationship with God which brought about transformation in the heart and life of the individual. The literature of early American Methodism is replete with

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attempts to describe the experience of religion. Out of these attempts, there emerged consistent patterns of expression, e.g., they spoke in very personal terms of being shackled by sin, of being released from their burden, of joy in the blessed Savior, which reveal a general character or spirit commonly linked with Methodism. Further, it is intended that the term, mind, should include the prevailing attitudes and customary practices which were characteristic of early American Methodism.

avowed purpose of reforming the land. With the division of the church in 1844, an era of American Methodism came to a close.

I. AMERICAN METHODISM AND THE AMERICAN CONTEXT

Upon his return to France in the 1830's, Alexis de Tocqueville reported to the people of Western Europe that "there is no country in the world in which the Christian religion retains a greater influence over the souls of men than in America."[1] Though many within the religious community would have shared in this judgment, it was a far cry from the conviction expressed by the church at the beginning of the century. The eighteenth century had come to a close with many lamenting the low state of morality throughout the land. The Presbyterian General Assembly, meeting in 1798 in somewhat typical fashion bemoaned the prevalent concern over the "general dereliction of religious principles and practices among our fellow citizens," and the "visible prevailing impiety and contempt for the laws and institutions of religion."[2] Lyman Beecher, writing in the first decade of the nineteenth century, observed:

> ...irreligion hath become in all parts of our land alarmingly prevalent. The name of God is blasphemed; the bible denounced; the sabbath profaned; the public worship of God is neglected; the intemperance hath destroyed thousands; and is

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[1] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. by Henry Reeve, ed. by Phillips Bradley, I (New York: J. and H.G. Langley, 1841), 303.

[2] Quoted by Winthrop S. Hudson, Religion in America (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 130.

> preparing the destruction of thousands more.... These are the causes which have destroyed other nations, their malignant nature is still the same, and unless their operation is suspended, they will destroy us.[3]

In traveling from Trenton to Philadelphia, Francis Asbury found himself in the midst of a group of men who were so "sceptical, deistical, atheistical that I thought if there were no other hell [than this] I should [still] strive with all my might to shun [it]."[4]

Prominent spokesmen within the religious community saw three factors as contributing to the alarming status of the religious life in America at the turn of the century. These were the War of Independence, the age of enlightenment, and the migration of the people West.[5] From the time of the Stamp Act in 1765 down through the establishing of a new nation under the Constitution of 1789, the energies of the people had focused on the goal of independence.[6] The leaders of the religious community, for the most part, shared in this concern. The church, in the wake of the revolution, rejoiced with the country in its new found freedom, but at the same time, it was aware that this freedom had come at some cost to the religious life of the country. Church life was disrupted on every hand. The thought of the day was turned away from religious themes by the excitement of war and politics.[7] Ministers, along with their laymen, marched off to war. Congregations were scattered, church buildings turned into barracks for troops, and seminaries closed because of the paucity of ministerial candidates.[8] The spokesmen for the churches were faced with the cold hard fact that the tide of religion in America was at a low ebb. Timothy Dwight, in looking back some two decades to the Revolutionary War was to observe, "War is at least as fatal to morals as to life or happiness." It was his conviction that "the profanation of the Sabbath...profaneness of language, drunkenness, gambling and lewdness," as well as a "vain method of thinking, concerning sacred things" could in one way or another be attributed to the influence of war.[9] James Finley, the Methodist itinerant to the Wyandot Indians, shared Dwight's conclusion. In his autobiography Finley wrote that "the war spirit unfortunately entered into many professors of religion, and as soon as they caught it they began to lose their religion." He further commented, "Wars and rumors of wars are peculiarily fatal to the mild and peaceful spirit of the Gospel...."[10]

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[3] Lyman Beecher, The Practicality of Suppressing Vice by Means of Societies for that Purpose (New London: Samuel Green, 1804), p. 19 as quoted by William W. Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 94f.

[4] Francis Asbury, The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, ed. by Elmer T. Clark, J.M. Potts, and J.S. Payton, I (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1958), 35.

[5] It must be stated that these movements did not exert in toto negative influences upon the religious life of the day. The democratic concerns for liberty and equality which spawned the War of Independence were shared by the religious leaders of the day. That the churches in America greatly benefited from the religious freedom secured through the revolutionary struggles is a fact above question. The spirit of the Enlightenment, with its concern for the dignity and freedom of the individual, also had a positive influence upon religious life. The new frontier afforded the church an ever expanding area for growth. However, in spite of these positive factors, many of the ministers within the evangelical community were more conscious of the negative influences which these movements seemed to foster throughout the nation.

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[6] H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, and Lefferts A. Loetscher, American Christianity: An Historical Interpretation with Representative Documents, I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), 430.

[7] Ibid., 438.

[8] Hudson, Religion in America, p. 110.

The character of religion in America was also influenced by the impact of the age of enlightenment, particularly as it came to expression in the philosophy of deism. The Enlightenment represented a protest in the eighteenth century against the more traditional understanding of authority in both the religious and secular context. The apostles of the Enlightenment, working from a Newtonian conception of a harmonious world, asserted that man had the natural ability to understand the "mysteries" of the universe apart from any answers which may be purported to be given in an act of revelation.[11] In juxtaposition to this, an emphasis was placed upon the worth and dignity of the natural man. Man was not so much a creature predetermined by an arbitrary decree, but an individual who was the product of his own experiences, over which he himself had some control. Man, within his own grasp, had the power to improve his human lot.[12]

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[9] Quoted by G. Adolph Koch, Republican Religion (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1964), p. 246.

[10] James B. Finley, Autobiography of Rev. James B. Finley; or Pioneer Life in the West, ed. by W.P. Strickland (Cincinnati: Methodist Book Concern, 1853), p. 258. Hereafter referred to as Autobiography.

[11] Merle Curti, The Growth of American Thought (New York: Harper and Row, 1951), p. 103.

This emphasis on the worth of the individual was to find a warm welcome in a country seeking its independence. The dignity accorded the individual and the corresponding stress upon his natural rights were in agreement with America's struggle for freedom. The spirit of the Enlightenment also sparked and nurtured the liberal Arminian themes which were making inroads into the New England theological scene. Arminianism in part reacted against the emotional extremes which had in many cases characterized the Great Awakening.[13] More critical, however, for the understanding of the liberalizing trends in New England theology was the growing concern for a more reasonable religion. The emancipated natural reason could no longer accept the rigid formulations of traditional orthodoxy. Such men as Charles Chauncy (1705-1787) and Jonathan Mayhew (1720-1766), though ostensibly remaining within the fold of New England Congregationalism, forged a more rational approach to religion which, as Conrad Wright has argued, represented the harbingers of Unitarianism in New England.[14]

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[12] *Ibid*., p. 104.

[13] See Hudson, *Religion in America*, p. 159.

[14] Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Boston: Star King Press, 1955), p. 8.

Unitarianism in America did not reach full bloom until after the turn of the century. However, whether viewed in its infancy or in its more matured expression, Unitarianism must not be equated with the most radical expression of the religion of the Enlightenment, viz., the philosophy of deism. The Unitarians, though pledged to reasonable religion, did not purport to be against biblical revelation. Conrad Wright, in his helpful study on the beginnings of Unitarianism, suggested that an appropriate nomenclature for the Unitarians was "supernatural rationalists." The Unitarians held that the unassisted reason could establish on its own the essentials of natural religion, such as the existence of God, man's moral obligations, and an ethical system or order of rewards and punishment. Unlike deism, the Unitarians affirmed with equal conviction the necessity of revelation to enhance and supplement those concepts derived from natural reason. The Bible afforded such a source of revelation.[15] The only revelation which deism would allow was that which man received through the natural order. Only through his creation did God directly communicate himself to man. Moreover, a careful study of the biblical record revealed to the deists so many contradictions, discrepancies, and absurdities as to completely disparage the acceptance of the Bible as a source of authority.[16]

One may properly speak of deism as a natural outgrowth of the Enlightenment. The deist accepted the Newtonian conception of an orderly universe and posited a God as the First Cause. God was viewed as the supreme architect, who, having designed and created a self-regulating universe, is now no longer concerned with his masterpiece.[17]

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[15] Ibid., p. 4.

[16] Herbert M. Morais, Deism in Eighteenth Century America (New York: Russell and Russell, 1960), pp. 121ff.

The philosophy of deism reached its peak of influence in America during the last decade of the eighteenth century. Its prominence during this period must be attributed, in part, to the similarity between the concerns of the Enlightenment and America's struggle for authentic independence. Its militant character was heightened by the criticisms which the American ecclesiastical structure directed against the extremes of the French revolution. These criticisms were, in effect, indictments of deism, for to the religious leaders in America, such extremes were the products of deism in Western Europe. Extreme "infidelity" and "atheism," for example, as were seemingly predominant in France could only rise in a country where God was viewed as totally withdrawn from his world. In the mind of the deists, the religious leaders in America, as they had been in France,[18] were the real enemies of true independence. Hence, if liberty were to be the status of the American way, the traditional ecclesiastical system had to be discredited and indeed destroyed. Militant deism found leadership in such men as

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[17] Curti, The Growth of American Thought, p. 110.

[18] The Catholic Church leaders of France for the most part had cast their lot with the French monarchs during the revolution. See Morais, Deism in Eighteenth Century America, p. 122.

Ethan Allen, Thomas Paine, and Elihu Palmer.[19]

Before the advent of this new leadership in America, the philosophy of deism was for the most part a topic of conversation among the more sophisticated peoples. However, through the writings of Allen and particularly Paine, and through the organizational hand of Palmer, deism was brought to the common man.

Ethan Allen's *Reason the Only Oracle of Man* represents the first militantly deistic work from the pen of an American author.[20] Rejecting the doctrine of revelation, the concept of miracle, and the Old Testament account of creation, Ethan Allen offered a "republican religion based upon law rather than whims, and on the dignity and freedom of man rather than on his depravity and servility."[21] The real significance of this book is that it was symptomatic of the aggressive stance which deism was to take in the closing decade of the eighteenth century.

A more critical work was *The Age of Reason* by Thomas Paine, which was published in America in the 1790's. Thomas Paine, who spent some time in Western Europe during the period of the French Revolution, was spurred to a more zealous deistic position by the refusal of the ecclesiastical structure of France to support the revolution in that country. Paine, desiring to protect the republicanism of the time, focused his energies on the churchly tradition of Western Europe and the Scriptures, in particular, which were held as authority for the church. He felt that if he could soundly demonstrate that the Scriptures were in reality an inadequate source of authority, he could strike at the very root of the religious system which stood in opposition to the revolution in France. It was not that Paine was an atheist. Rather, it was the "traditional" understanding of God and Scriptures propagated by the churches which was driving modern man away from true religion.[22]

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[19] See Koch, *Republican Religion*, particularly chap. i, "Ethan Allen, Free Thinking Revolutionists," and chap. ii, "Elihu Palmer, Militant Deist,"; see also Morais, *Deism in Eighteenth Century America*, chap. v, "Deism Militant: Early National Period 1789-1805."

[20] The actual writing of this work was probably done by a Dr. Thomas Young, a physician and close friend of Allen. See Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, p. 157.

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 158.

In The Age of Reason, Paine focused on the question of revelation in general, and the Judaic-Christian account in particular. Rejecting the idea that revelation may come through any spoken or written expression, Paine was to affirm that in creation alone does God communicate directly with man. Hence, the biblical account, though purported to be authoritative, could not be binding. The contents of the scriptural account were simply not acceptable to the judgment of reason. Previously accepted evidences for the truth of Christianity were discredited. The miracle stories were labeled the creation of impostors, and prophecy was judged to be vague. All in all, "the Christian system of faith, including in it the whimsical account of creation, the strange story of Eve, the snake and the apple; the ambiguous use of the man-god; the corporeal idea of the death of a god; the mythological idea of a family of gods, and the Christian system of arithmetic that three is one and one is three...." was too absurd.[23]

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[22] Morais, Deism in Eighteenth Century America, p. 122.

At the time of the publication of The Age of Reason in America, Thomas Paine was still in Western Europe. It was Elihu Palmer who was to become the itinerant apostle for the more radical deists in America. His contribution to deism must be measured by the leadership which he gave to the movement rather than his writings. With the "faith and credulity of an evangelical enthusiast", he went about preaching the faith of deism and republicanism of the 1790's."[24]

In truth, not all of the deists in America were to take such a militant posture, but the attack upon the Christian tradition by such men as Paine and Palmer was a point of deep concern to church fathers in America. Voice after voice was raised, lamenting the influence of deism upon the country. Lyman Beecher, in his autobiography, observed that Yale in 1793

> ...was in a most ungodly state. The college church was almost extinct. Most of the students were sceptical and rowdies were plenty. Wine and liquor were kept in many rooms; intemperance, profanity, gambling, and licentiousness were

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[23] Thomas Paine, The Age of Reason, Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology, part 1 (New York: Willey Book Company, n.d.), p. 57; quoted by Morais, Deism in Eighteenth Century America, p. 21.

[24] Koch, Republican Religion, p. 186.

> common. I hardly know how I escaped....That was the day of the infidelity of the Tom Paine school....Most of the class before me were infidels, and called each other Voltaire, Rousseau, D'Alembert, etc., etc.[25]

Nathan Bangs, the Methodist historian and theologian of the first part of the nineteenth century made a similar observation.

> About this time [1795] the minds of many people were corrupted by the deistical writings of Thomas Paine, whose effusions against the Bible were received with greater avidity by Americans on account of the eminent services he had rendered to his country during the war of the revolution. But Thomas Paine as a politician and Thomas Paine as a theologian were very different men. His book, however, against the Bible, was published by the book sellers, which, together with others of a kindred character, were widely circulated, and they were exerting a most deleterious influence upon the minds of many of our citizens, and threatened to poison the fountains of knowledge with their pestiferous contents. It could hardly be otherwise, under these circumstances, then that immorality should abound, and the love of many wax 'cold'.[26]

Meanwhile the mass movement of the American population to the West, beyond the mountains, was under way. The close of the eighteenth century witnessed new pockets of settlement along the Ohio River. Soon this westward movement was to reach full momentum. Kentucky became a member of the Union in 1793, Tennessee in 1796, Ohio in 1803, and Indiana and Illinois followed in the second decade of the nineteenth century.

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[25] Lyman Beecher, Autobiography, Correspondence of Lyman Beecher, D.D., ed. by Charles Beecher, I (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1886), 43.

[26] Nathan Bangs, A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, II (New York: Mason and Lane, 1840), 21.

The movement of the American people presented the church with a new challenge and responsibility. It began at a time in American life when few people were churched. It has been estimated that only one person in fifteen had any affiliation with the church.[27] Furthermore, those who were church members were severed from their churches by the westward movement and were faced with the difficulty of establishing new relationships in a country where religious institutions were few.

Much of the decadence which the religious leaders saw throughout the country seemed to become intensified on the frontier, and not without reason. It was for the most part a less sophisticated people who at first forged their way through the mountain passes. The physical demands of a new frontier naturally focused attentions on the material rather than the spiritual. Endless days of hard labor, little opportunity for entertainment, infrequent contact with friends, these all contributed to the low moral status of frontier life.[28] Emotions vented in such an environment often took exaggerated form. One source of relief was hard liquor. Drinking was a common practice among the frontiersmen. James Finley noted in his autobiography that "a house could not be raised, a field of wheat cut down, nor could there be a log rolling, a husking, a quilting, a wedding, or a funeral without the aid of alcohol."[29] Robert Davidson, a Presbyterian historian, in retrospect, commented on the frontier period.

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[27] Hudson, American Protestantism, p. 196.

[28] See Charles A. Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting, Religion's Harvest Time (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1955), chap. 1.

> ...worldly mindedness, infidelity, and dissipation threatened to deluge the land and sweep away all vestiges of piety and morality. The rising generation was growing up in almost universal ignorance of religious obligation.[30]

The War of Independence, the Enlightenment, and the movement westward helped to create an alarming situation, and the religious leaders called for revival within the land. Lyman Beecher spoke for the church at the beginning of the century.

> Whatever we do, it must be done quickly, for there is a tide in human things which waits not - moments on which the destiny of the nation balances, when the light dust may turn the right way or the wrong. And such is the condition of our nation now. Mighty influences are bearing on us and a slight effort now may secure what ages of repentance cannot remove away. We must educate the whole nation while we may. All - all who would vote must be enlightened, and reached by the restraining and preserving energies of heaven.[31]

The concern of early American Methodism for the spiritual condition of the country prompted the Methodist conferences to appoint the first Friday in March, 1796, "as a most solemn day of fasting, humilation, prayer, and supplication...that we should bewail our manifold sins and iniquities - our growing idolatry, which is covetousness, and the prevailing love of the world...substituting means and opinions for religion," and to call upon the Lord to "stop the growing infidelity of this age, by calling out men who shall preach and live the gospel."[32] Such men were to follow. During the first part of the nineteenth century, Methodism put its concern into action throughout the land, both in the East and in the expanding frontier.

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[29] Finley, Autobiography, p. 248.

[30] Quoted by Johnson, The Frontier Camp Meeting, Religion's Harvest Time, p. 9.

[31] Quoted by Jerald C. Brauer, Protestantism in America (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1953), p. 143.

In order to appreciate fully the course which American Methodism was to take, the general spirit of the day must be understood. Independence had been won. A new spirit emerged throughout the land. The eighteenth century, the age of enlightenment, gave way to the nineteenth century, the romantic era. Of the first part of the nineteenth century Vernon Parrington wrote:

> It was our first great period of exploitation, and from it emerged, as naturally as the cock from the mother egg, the spirit of romance, gross and tawdry in vulgar minds, dainty and refined in the more cultivated. But always romance. The days of realism were past, and it was quietly laid away with its wig and the small clothes of an outworn generation.[33]

The romantic era did not stand in contrast to the age of enlightenment in every particular. Both, for example, sought to underscore the importance of the individual and his freedom. The general character of the two ages differed, however. The enlightened man turned to that which his mind judged to be reasonable. The romantic sought out new frontiers at the behest of his imagination. Whereas the one was convinced by his intellect, the other was more often swayed by his emotions.

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[32] Bangs, A History of the Methodist Episcopal Church, II, 22.

[33] Vernon Parrington, "Introduction," Main Currents in American Thought, II (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Company, 1927), v.

Romanticism in nineteenth century America had many shades and varied expressions.[34] Clearly, romanticism as expressed in New England transcendentalism, for example, took on a more sophisticated character and revealed a greater relation to the English romantics than the popular romanticism which was characteristic on the frontier. However, whether one remained among the established communities of the East, or moved with the growing edge of the new nation in the West, he was influenced by the spirit of romanticism.

Ralph Gabriel, in his essay on "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth Century America," cited a threefold concern of nineteenth century romanticism. The romantic movement emphasized (1) the value of the individual, (2) the significance of the emotions of men, and (3) the importance of nature as a manifestation of beauty and source of inspiration.[35] The value of the individual had been previously emphasized by the apostles of the Enlightenment. It had been the underlying concern of the Constitution and became the unwritten theme of the new nation. Human affairs in the new world were simply viewed in terms of the individual. It is not difficult to understand why. There were relatively few people in the new nation, particularly on the expanding frontier. To each family and each settlement the individual and his resources were of inestimable worth. Progress was realized through the enterprise of the individual. Indeed, it was the responsibility of the individual to effect progress in his own domain. This emphasis, Gabriel has suggested, rested upon the acceptance of the basic postulate that God as Creator of man, has also created the moral order in which man is to function. Man, who was endowed with the ability to understand the laws of the moral order, has been placed under the obligation to transform these laws into individual and social action and thereby effect progress throughout the land.[36] Such an emphasis clearly underscores the significance of the individual. Gabriel's idea gives support to the judgment of Alexis de Tocqueville:

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[34] Arthur Lovejoy, in his article, "On the Discrimination of Romanticisms," has suggested that it is needful to approach the subject recognizing the plurality of romanticisms. There may be some common denominator among the varying romanticisms, but it cannot be established that they are similar in all essentials. See Essays in the History of Ideas (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1948), pp. 228-253.

[35] Ralph Gabriel, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth Century America," Church History, XIX (1950), 43.

> Upon close examination it will be seen that there is in every age some peculiar, preponderant fact with which all others are connected; the fact almost always gives birth to some pregnant idea, or some ruling passion, which attracts to itself and bears away in its course all the feelings and opinions of the time; it is like a stream toward which each of the neighboring rivulets

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[36] Ralph Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1940), pp. 19-21.

seems to flow.[37]

The predominant theme in America, de Tocqueville concluded, was individualism.

A correlative to the concept of individualism was the stress upon freedom. In the new nation, one did not speak of the individual except in the context of his liberty. To be sure, freedom had been the overriding concern at the close of the eighteenth century, but then it was something to be won or defended. With the advent of the nineteenth century, it was something existentially realized.[38] "This principle [of liberty]," de Tocqueville wrote, "is indigenous to America. It dwells in the fatness of the hills, it riots unrestrained in her deep and gloomy forests - its altar is found wherever the free air braces the nerves of her hardy sons."[39] It was freedom spawned by the vast new countryside of a new world.[40]

In nineteenth century America, man also began to listen more and more to his emotions. Because of the demands of a new and expanding nation, American life tended to be more active than reflective. In many respects the intellectual life of the country was stifled. Not only was there little time, particularly on the edge of the frontier, for reflection, but also there was little of substantial character about which one could reflect. The isolation which was characteristic of the new world prevented the flow and discussion of ideas. One rather widespread source for communication of ideas was the church and its ministry. Yet, in many respects, the church only nourished the anti-intellectual character of the day. The man of the new world was caught up in the practical concerns of existence with all of its uncertainties. In these existential moments of life, he quite naturally listened to his emotions.

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[37] Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, trans. by Henry Reeve, ed. by Phillips Bradley, II (New York: J. and H.G. Langley, 1841), 95.

[38] Carl R. Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850 (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 7.

[39] Quoted in The Methodist Quarterly Review, XXIII (1841), 414.

[40] Sidney E. Mead, The Lively Experiment (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), p. 6.

One of the emotions which motivated nineteenth century man, in spite of his adversities, was optimism. He faced life with more than just a sense of solemn duty to improve his lot as had been promulgated by the eighteenth century Calvinist Divines. He forged ahead in this new land of unlimited opportunities with the feeling that nothing would be denied him. He held the key to treasures on earth as well as in heaven.[41]

The inspiration which nineteenth century man received from nature is a familiar story. Perhaps the most classic expression of this was in the New England Transcendentalism of Emerson and Thoreau. For them, nature was that avenue which brought man into contact with the infinite and immanent God, the Over-soul. Emerson's lines to a purple Rhodora clearly reveal the transcendentalist's understanding of the unity of nature, man, and God.

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[41] Fish, The Rise of the Common Man, 1830-1850, p. 10.

> Why thou were there, O rival of the rose
> I never thought to ask, I never knew:
> But in my simple ignorance, suppose the self-
> same power that brought me there brought you.[42]

As romanticism moved across America in the first part of the nineteenth century, it nestled warmly in the arms of American life and thought. Into this new nation, intoxicated with the romantic spirit, the Methodist itinerant rode. He carried with him the evangelical message of the Wesleyan tradition which in many respects shared the concerns of the spirit of the day. The message focused on the individual and his relation to God. Salvation was presented in terms of freedom from the bondage of Satan and liberty in the new life in Christ Jesus. Implicit in the evangelicalism of Methodism was a certain optimism. It was not that man was no longer viewed as depraved. The optimism of the Methodist itinerant rested upon the universality of divine grace.

Winthrop Hudson has observed that with the advent of the nineteenth century, the face of religion in America changed from a puritan evangelicalism to a popular evangelicalism. He further suggested that American Methodism was the most representative expression of the latter.[43] Puritan evangelicalism, which mothered the Great Awakening of the previous century, had its roots in the theology of John Calvin, though that theology had been modified to some degree by the federal school of seventeenth century Puritanism.[44] The determinism implicit in Calvinism, while acceptable to the stable and rather exclusive communities of New England, did not fit into the philosophy of the new nation. Statements about the Sovereign God who determines all things became less and less pleasing to a people who had fought and won their independence. They turned to the popular evangelicalism of the nineteenth century.

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[42] Quoted by Gabriel, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth Century America," Church History, XIX (1950), 41.

> Its emphasis upon the individual and his emotions, its central vision of a perfect man in remote antiquity, its gospel of love which cleanses the world [these] all reflected that romantic mood so important in Europe and America in the first half of the nineteenth century....The central theme of romantic Christianity was the teaching that liberty comes to the man from whose limbs the fetters of sin have fallen. The central theme of romantic democratic faith was the doctrine of the free individual.[45]

Popular evangelicalism, as expressed by early American Methodism, can be called romantic evangelicalism.[46] The concerns which Gabriel suggested as being characteristic of nineteenth century romanticism were also shared by the Methodist itinerants. The message of American Methodism was directed toward the individual with the intent of effecting a vital religious experience in his heart and life. Even though puritan evangelicalism of the previous century desired the same end, American Methodism, because of its Arminian background, was not shackled with the necessitarian principles implicit in Calvinism. The evangelicals of the past century maintained that the destiny of the individual was determined by a sovereign decree. American Methodism could not reconcile this viewpoint with the dignity of the individual. To the Methodists, it robbed man of his dignity. The uniqueness of man consisted in the fact that he was a free moral agent who had the power to determine his destiny. By its stress upon the freedom of the individual, early American Methodism underscored the significance of the individual and herein shared one of the main themes of nineteenth century romanticism.

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[43] Hudson, *American Protestantism*, p. 197.

[44] Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1965). See appendix on "The Federal School of Theology," pp. 502ff.

[45] Gabriel, *The Course of American Democratic Thought*, p. 34.

[46] See Frederick C. Gill, *The Romantic Movement and Methodism* (London: Epworth Press, 1937) for a study in the relation of English Romanticism and the Wesleyan revivals.

As stated above, evangelicalism, whether puritan or popular, directed its energies toward effecting a religion of the heart. However, each approached the same goal via different avenues. Puritan evangelicalism purposed to influence men through well-reasoned presentations of the gospel message. Popular evangelicalism on the whole aimed more at the emotions. This is not to say that puritan evangelicalism neglected the emotions. Clearly, no one used the potential of the emotions more effectively than Jonathan Edwards. On the other hand, popular evangelicalism did not totally abrogate sound doctrine,[47] though it was often content to present only the bare essentials. Perry Miller suggested that the concern of the popular evangelicals was like that of Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Each in his own way was intent upon filling the mind with compelling images that would bring about a response. "Out of revolt against theology, and indeed against the academic descriptives of rhetoric and logic, the revivalists forged, and highly developed a romantic communication."[48] It was Miller's judgment that American Methodism took the lead in this "hermeneutical pragmatism."[49]

John Strange, a young itinerant who traveled with James Finley, was, according to Finley, quite adept in such preaching.

> When he described heaven, which he did in the beautiful and impressive imagery of the Bible, the mind seemed transported to that bright world.... When he would describe the dying Christian, so vividly would he bring before the mind the triumphs of the parting scene, that...you would be constrained to wish yourself with them in that hour. When by him, the violated laws spoke out its thunders, he could rise to an awful sublimity; ...and, with a quiet and significant gesture of his hand, he would indicate the doom of the

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[47] This will become clear in the progress of this study, particularly in the second chapter where attention will be directed toward some of the basic theological presuppositions of the evangelical message of early American Methodism.

[48] Perry Miller, The Life of the Mind in America (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1965), p. 61.

[49] Ibid.

> finally impenitent, and startle the most hardened from their seats.[50]

Joseph Holdich, Wilbur Fisk's biographer, noted that Fisk's description of man "plunging over the edge [of the precipice] into perdition's gulf" was so compelling that on one occasion a person, who was sitting in front of the pulpit, reached out his arms to catch the sinner in his fall.[51] Numerous examples could be given of Methodism's conscious attempt to paint vivid pictures which would stir their listeners into a response. Billy Hibbard's depiction of the "awful state of the damned" perhaps is characteristic.

> The rich man was now there. O, the shrieks and cries while vengeance beats down a heavy storm that shrinks them low in the dashing waves. See! See! See the rich man raising his head above the surging billows. Hark! Hark! how he cried, water! water! water! to cool my tormented tongue.[52]

With early American Methodism there was a de-emphasis upon the normative content of religious experience. The essence of religious experience became quite subjective in scope. With American Methodism there was no longer present the extreme preoccupation with the sovereignty of God, and therefore, a lesser need for lengthy disputations to uphold the justice of God in his sovereign decrees. In Methodism, attention seemed to center more on Jesus, the

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[50] Finley, Autobiography, p. 201.

[51] Joseph Holdich, Life of Wilbur Fisk, D.D. (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1842), p. 336.

[52] Billy Hibbard, Memoirs (New York: Published for the author, 1825), p. 229.

Savior. Whereas in the puritan evangelicalism the mind was overcome with awe as one stood in the presence of God, in the romantic evangelicalism of Methodism the heart of the individual was filled with sentiment for the Savior. Indeed, it was as though one were having a love affair with Jesus. Frequent bursts of affection for Jesus were more than common in the writings of the American Methodists. Jesus was said to be precious to the heart. His name was adored.[53] William McKendree, who was the first native American to be elected Bishop, in a moment of introspection commented on his solemn feelings and his great desire for his Lord. While meditating alone he met his "adorable Savior. All my sorrow," he related, "was emptied into his bosom, and I had access to the throne of grace."[54] Wilbur Fisk, in the same spirit, remarked that he had evidence that "Jesus is my friend.... O, that I could ever lie at the foot of the cross and adore that Savior who has done so much for me."[55] In a letter, written by Freeborn Garrettson to John Wesley just before the death of the latter, Garrettson spoke of the Methodists in America as the "lovers of Jesus."[56]

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[53] See, for example, Heman Bangs, Autobiography and Journal of Rev. Heman Bangs (New York: N. Tibbles and Son, 1874), p. 220. Hereafter referred to as Autobiography.

[54] Robert Paine, Life and Times of William McKendree, I (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1869), 74.

[55] Holdich, Life of Wilbur Fisk, D.D., p. 75.

[56] Nathan Bangs, The Life of Freeborn Garrettson (2nd ed.; New York: Emory and Waugh, 1830), p. 147.

Still another characteristic shared in common with the romantic interests of the day was the significance of nature as a source of inspiration. The Methodist itinerant, by the very demands of his mission, found himself next to nature many hours each day. Though he faced the cold of winter, it is equally true that he found sermons in stones that warmed his heart. It is not unusual to read of witnesses to having received inspiration from the natural world. Ezekiel Cooper, during his ministry on Long Island, observed that while riding down toward the sea, "he was filled with admiration on beholding the wonderful works of God."[57] Nathan Bangs seems to have been particularly sensitive to the inspiring messages of nature. When he was yet a young man, Bangs traveled with two of his brothers and a brother-in-law to Canada. He observed that the progress was slow but the trip enjoyable because "the vernal scenery, the passage along the streams and valleys, the night camp in the woods, ...relieved the tediousness of our slow pace."[58] Upon coming to Niagra Falls, Bangs said that he stood there "in silent awe as I gazed upon the wonder of creation."[59] Later in his ministry, as he traveled with his wife down the St. Lawrence river to begin a ministry in Montreal, Bangs found the surrounding scenery a source of comfort. "The voyage down the St. Lawrence presented many picturesque and some grand scenes [which] refreshed our minds, burdened with anxiety respecting the untried scenes we were about to encounter."[60] Heman Bangs, a brother to Nathan, observed that his trip across the Catskills in the company of fellow ministers afforded all "a panoramic view of a fine extent of beautiful country, showing us the bounty of a benignant Providence, and was enough to fill our hearts with fervent gratitude."[61]

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[57] George Phoebus, _Beams of Light on Early Methodism in America_ (New York: Phillips and Hunt, 1887), p. 36. This work is largely based on the papers of Ezekiel Cooper and concentrates on his life.

[58] Abel Stevens, _Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D._ (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1863), p. 34.

[59] _Ibid._, p. 35.

It has been observed that the first decade of the nineteenth century was marked by many religious leaders calling for reform throughout the land. Moral decadence seemingly was the pattern of the day. Out of this company, feeling deep concern for the spiritual condition of the country, there arose a generation of men who spearheaded a second general awakening in America. Concurrently, America was witnessing still another awakening in the guise of romanticism. The orderly and reasonable world of the age of enlightenment gave way to the exciting, limitless, and, yes, uncertain world of romance. The new romantic era did not abandon all the themes of the previous period of the Enlightenment. Indeed, it embraced such themes as individualism and liberty. The legacy of the Enlightenment became the experience of a people in a new nation.

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[60] *Ibid.*, p. 119.

[61] Bangs, *Autobiography*, p. 237.

The evangelical revivals and the new wave of romanticism shared similar concerns. Each in its own way represented a reaction against the rather cold indifferent world view which had been generated by the Enlightenment. Each centered on the individual and his inner life. It was, then, with good reason that they should unite in their efforts to bring about renewal in the land.

Methodism provided the common meeting ground for evangelicalism and romanticism. From its Wesleyan heritage, Methodism brought to America the message of the warm heart. Religion was to be first and foremost an existential reality for each individual. Attention was directed toward the inner life and how one subjectively experienced his relation to God in Christ Jesus. The Methodist mind more commonly expressed this relationship in terms of emotion-packed sentiment rather than in well-reasoned doctrine. The religion of the heart took precedence over the religion of the head. Such romantic evangelicalism flourished in America. William Inge once observed, perhaps in a cynical vain, that "a religion succeeds, not because it is true but because it suits its worshippers."[62] The full implications of this statement may be open for debate, but it does seem fair to say that the rise of Methodism in America must have been due, in part, to the fact that its message, which focused on the individual and his emotions, fulfilled the demands and expectations of the people. The enthusiasm of the general populace, in turn, enlivened Methodism's stress upon heart religion.

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[62] William R. Inge, Platonic Traditions in English Thought (New York: Longmans,Green, and Company, 1926), p. 14.

To characterize early American Methodism as romantic evangelicalism alone is to consider but one side of the coin. The evangelical message was directed toward effecting a religious experience in the individual. It was essentially this pragmatic concern for the existential reality of religion that created tension between Methodism and the theological community of the day. Methodism became increasingly aware of its incompatibility with other positions. When this came to expression, the more polemical character of Methodism was made manifest.

The early American Methodists as a rule did not consider polemical writings their primary task. The fact that there were to appear such writings is only a further expression of the pragmatic mind of American Methodists. The positions taken by liberal theology on the one hand and traditional Calvinism on the other were detrimental to the evangelical message as Methodism interpreted it. It was this practical concern for the cause of evangelical Christianity that prompted Methodism to take a more definitive stance in the theological community.

The theological spectrum in the first half of the nineteenth century included on the left, Unitarianism and Universalism, and on the right, traditional orthodoxy as expressed in Calvinism, though Calvinism had varying faces.

With the beginning of the nineteenth century, deism in America began to fade as a significant force. However, natural religion continued in America in its more moderate expressions of Unitarianism and Universalism.

Ostensibly Unitarianism was launched in America by William E. Channing's famous Baltimore sermon on "Unitarian Christianity."[63] In the sermon, which in actuality represented the culmination of liberal thought during the first part of the nineteenth century, Channing had called into question the orthodox views of (1) the Trinity, (2) the person of Christ, (3) native depravity, and (4) the nature of Christ's work. On every point Channing placed himself over against the traditional orthodox views. Herein, liberalism's arch spokesman laid down the gauntlet. Orthodoxy soon accepted the challenge, and the ensuing debates were carried out for the most part by the traditional Calvinists in New England Congregationalism.

At this point in time Methodism was simply seeking to find its way into the New England community. It was in no real position to raise any significant voice against the Unitarian position. Further, in that Unitarianism, per se, realized its greatest strength in the intellectual centers of New England, Unitarianism quite naturally came into conflict with the more traditional Calvinism which had controlled many of these centers.

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[63] The complete title of the sermon was, "Unitarian Christianity: A Sermon Delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Fared Sparks, to the Pastoral Care of the First Independent Church in Baltimore, May 7, 1819," The Works of William E. Channing, D.D. (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1877), pp. 367-384.

As the century progressed, American Methodism was to confront Unitarianism but in an indirect manner. Methodism's main energy was directed against a related movement, Universalism. Whereas Unitarianism tended to thrive in the cultural centers of New England, Universalism was most prominent in the rural areas among the common people. It was here among the rural populace that Methodism came face to face with liberalism as expressed by the Universalists. However, in that some Universalists were at the same time Unitarian, Methodism had to come to grips with both.

During the last half of the eighteenth century the liberal wings of the New England theological community called into question some of the positions of traditional Calvinism. This questioning spirit, in part, was encouraged by the extremes which accompanied the Great Awakening in New England. However, more significantly, it seems, the demands for a reasonable religion were gaining a hearing. Those disciples who were committed to a more enlightened expression of religion would no longer allow certain doctrines laden with apparent contradictions to be placed in the holy of holies just beyond the grasp of the seeking mind. Rather, such cardinal doctrines as freedom of the will and native depravity were brought before the bar of reason. Whenever a doctrine was judged unreasonable, there followed a restatement of the doctrine.

The indebtedness of the liberalizing trends to the age of enlightenment is unmistakable. The authority which the Enlightenment had accorded to the natural reason was warmly embraced by liberal theology. Man by virtue of this newly acclaimed dignity enjoyed a more desirable status in theological discourse. No longer was the destiny of man viewed as being subject to the arbitrary decisions of God wherein some were elected to salvation while others were sentenced to damnation. No longer could one view man as a moral creature who had not the power to do what he ought to do. No longer should man be held guilty for a crime which he did not commit. Such had been the plight of man in traditional Calvinism. Calvinism held that God was, first and foremost, a sovereign God. For that reason the justice of his actions could not be questioned. In the liberal response against orthodoxy, attention was directed toward a benevolent God whose first concern was the happiness of his children.[64]

From this last position liberal thought went on to argue that the benevolence of God was most completely evidenced in the salvation of all mankind. Should any man be condemned to eternal punishment, God would be less than infinitely benevolent.[65] The question of punishment at this point was not one of punishment versus no punishment, but rather, the purpose and extent of punishment. From the liberal perspective, punishment was not viewed as a means of appeasing the divine wrath. Drawing upon the parent-child relationship, it was reasoned that punishment was disciplinary in character. It was employed to realize the desired end. Charles Chauncy, in a sermon published toward the close of the eighteenth century, underscored the disciplinary character of punishment. The amount of suffering experienced by the individual is proportionate to the hold which he has on moral depravity. In time, either prior to or at the point after physical death, the soul will turn away from depravity to become subject to God.[66]

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[64] Wright, The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America, p. 161.

[65] Ibid., p. 185.

Chauncy had been reluctant to present his views on universal salvation. However, with the beginning of the nineteenth century, such reticence was fast passing away. Universalism was soon to have a significant voice in the land, and this was due to a large degree to the efforts of Hosea Ballou. In his late teens Ballou was converted in a revival and joined the church. Shortly after his conversion he was impressed by Universalistic writings and united with their fellowship. At the age of twenty-five, some five years after he first was attracted to Universalism, Ballou accepted his first pastorate. Ballou quickly rose to a place of prominence in the Universalist movement and was to give direction to the formulation of "The Winchester Profession" of belief. It included the following articles:

I. We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the

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[66] Ibid., p. 196.

> Old and New Testaments contain a revelation of the character of God, and of the duty, interests, and final destination of mankind.
>
> II. We believe that there is one God, whose nature is love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of grace, who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness.
>
> III. We believe that holiness and true happiness are inseparably connected, and that believers ought to be careful to maintain order and practice good works; for these things are good and profitable unto men.[67]

The best expression of Ballou's thought is to be found in his Treatise on the Atonement which he first published in 1805.[68] In this work he considered the nature of sin and the atonement, and the consequences of the latter for all mankind. The first section of his book is an argument for the finite character of sin. He eschewed the more traditional view that sin is infinite in character because it has been committed against an infinite God. Against such reasoning Ballou contended that a finite creature could in no way bring about an infinite effect.[69] From a consideration of the nature of sin he turned to the concept of the atonement. Again he questioned the more accepted view of the atonement as satisfaction. He held, with substantial scriptural references, that the atonement must be understood as being moral in character rather than legal. Its purpose was the reconciliation of man to God, not vice versa.

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[67] Quoted by Richard Eddy, "History of Universalism," in Joseph Allen and Richard Eddy, A History of the Unitarians and the Universalists in the United States (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1894), p. 431.

[68] Hosea Ballou, Treatise on the Atonement (4th ed.; Boston: Marsh, Capen, and Lyon, 1832).

[69] Ibid., p. 24.

> To conclude, the supposition that Deity receives the atonement, or any possible advantage from the gospel plan, whereby an alteration is effected in him, for the better, amounts to the inexplicable absurdity of making omniscience more wise, omnipotence more powerful, justice more just....[70]

In the final section of the book, Ballou contended for, as the consequences of the atonement, "the universal holiness and happiness of all mankind...."[71] His argument was built on four interrelated propositions.[72] It is inconsistent with the nature of divine goodness to conceive of God as creating a being that would experience more misery than happiness. In the second place, the goodness of God is commensurate with his power and knowledge. All created beings than are objects of his goodness and to argue that any one being is destitute of such goodness is tantamount to saying that the divine knowledge did so comprehend such a being. Further, there is as much reason for saying that although God is infinite in power, he did not create all things, as there would be to reason that God, though infinite in goodness, witholds that goodness from a certain member of his creation. Finally, if the Almighty Creator did not possess power to make all his creatures happy, it was not an act of goodness to create them in the first place. "We then reduce our opponent," he concluded, "to the necessity of telling us, if those, whom he believes will be endlessly lost be those whom God could save but would not! or those whom he would save but could not!"[73]

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[70] _Ibid_., p. 112.

[71] _Ibid_., p. 136.

[72] _Ibid_., pp. 177f.

The influence of Universalism though strongly felt in the New England states was not limited to that area alone. In fact Universalism was to reach into more sections of the country than Unitarianism.[74] At a very early date Universalism was present in New Jersey and Pennsylvania.[75] Shortly after the turn of the century its prophets were sounding out the new frontier. Peter Cartwright recorded in his autobiography that during the first decade or so of the nineteenth century a number of the Methodist itinerants in the West joined with the Universalists.[76]

Because of Universalism's widespread hearing among the common people, American Methodism confronted it first hand. Disputations, prearranged or otherwise, with men of Universalist leanings often took place in public places. The polemics which American Methodism carried out against Universalism did not consist of oral discussions alone. Much of the early writings of American Methodism took up the questions posed by the Universalists. Timothy Merritt, in an article published by The Methodist Magazine,[77] reviewed in detail Ballou's Treatise on the Atonement. Merritt corroborated with Wilbur Fisk to examine the tenants of Universalism.[78]

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[73] Ibid., p. 178.

[74] Hudson, Religion in America, p. 162.

[75] Eddy, "History of Universalism," in Joseph Allen and Richard Eddy, A History of the Unitarians and the Universalists in the United States, pp. 436f.

[76] Peter Cartwright, The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright (Centennial ed.; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1956), p. 40.

From the perspective of American Methodism, the cause of evangelical Christianity was equally being threatened by Calvinism on the right. The judgment which Methodism passed down on Calvinism was indeed a harsh one. Wilbur Fisk expressed the conviction that had Methodism been prominent in the New England states at the turn of the century, Unitarianism and Universalism would not have made the gains that they did.[79] The failure of traditional Calvinism to come to grips with critical questions of the faith sent many to the gates of the liberal camp.

Calvinism in America during the first half of the nineteenth century had many faces. There were at least three rather well-defined groups: the Old Line Calvinists, the Consistent Calvinists or Edwardeans, and the New Divinity men who centered in New Haven.[80]

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[77] Timothy Merritt, "An Essay on Atonement," The Methodist Magazine, VII (1824), 201-209; 241-251.

[78] Timothy Merritt, A Discourse on Universal Salvation [also] Two Discourses on the Same Subject by Wilbur Fisk (New York: Emory and Waugh, 1829). See also George Peck, Universal Salvation Considered (Montrose, Pa.: Lewis, 1827), and Luther Lee, Universalism Examined and Refuted (Watertown, N.Y.: Knowlton and Rice, 1836).

[79] Wilbur Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy (New York: Mason and Lane, 1837), p. 83.

In the wake of the Great Awakening, Calvinism in New England divided into the Old Calvinists and the Consistent Calvinists. The former represented moderate Calvinism as it existed down to the time of Edwards. The disciples of Edwards comprised the latter group. The difference in the two groups was, as Haroutunian suggested, one of temperament.[81] The Old Calvinists by nature tended to be more practical in their concerns. The Edwardeans were inclined to speculate, seeking logically consistent explanations of the relation between God and man.[82] Throughout the last half of the eighteenth century, the Calvinists, for the most part, debated issues among themselves. However, William E. Channing's famous Baltimore sermon made it clear that traditional Calvinism could no longer ignore the rising influence of Unitarianism. The Old Line and Consistent Calvinists united in their defense of Calvinism, overlooking their own differences for a time. With one voice New England Calvinism sought to defend traditional orthodoxy against Channing's anti-trinitarian charge and his subordinate view of the person of Christ.

The unanimity of New England Calvinism, however, was shaken when it faced Channing's third charge. Having rejected the traditional view of the trinity and the person of Christ, Channing focused on the question of native depravity. Channing argued that the Calvinist doctrine denied the benevolent character of God in that "it teaches that God brings us into life wholly depraved," and with a nature "which exposes us to God's displeasure and wrath."[83] This statement on native depravity precipitated the "Wood 'n Ware Controversy" as it came to be called, which lasted for some three years.[84] Leonard Woods of Andover, who wrote in defense of orthodox Calvinism, reaffirmed the doctrine of native depravity. He was, however, hard put when he sought to respond to Channing's accusation that such a doctrine could not be harmonized with the benevolent God of mercy. He ineptly admitted that God could be said to be benevolent and yet perform acts which an earthly father would not think of doing. In somewhat typical Calvinistic apologizing of the period, he finally stated that it was not for him or any other man to attempt to harmonize one doctrine with another, but only to uphold those doctrines which were clearly revealed in the Scriptures.[85] Henry Ware, spokesman for the Unitarian position, was quick to point out that Woods had evaded the issue, viz., the inconsistency between total depravity and divine benevolence.[86]

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[80] Hudson, Religion in America, p. 179.

[81] Joseph Haroutunian, Piety versus Moralism: The Passing of New England Theology (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932), p. 234.

[82] Sidney E. Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1942), pp. 97f.

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[83] Quoted by H. Shelton Smith, "Introduction," Horace Bushnell, ed. by H. Shelton Smith (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 13.

[84] Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor, p. 140.

[85] Smith, "Introduction," Horace Bushnell, pp. 13f.

Nathaniel W. Taylor, for some time, had viewed this scrimmage from the sidelines. It was Taylor's judgment that Woods, by his inability to satisfactorily answer the Unitarian charge, had moved back the controversy with the Unitarians some fifty years.[87] Woods had simply sought reclusion from the onslaught of Unitarianism in orthodox verbiage which was laden with absurdities not acceptable to the man of the day. Taylor could remain a spectator no longer, and through his review of Andrews Norton's "Thoughts on True and False Religion," he catapulted himself into the midst of the controversy.[88]

The significance of this review was that herein Taylor advanced himself as the spokesman for New England Calvinism. However, not everyone in the New England community accepted Taylor's views, particularly in respect to native depravity. There was an increasing concern among a number of the religious leaders, viz., the Consistent Calvinists, over the position taken by Taylor. It is against this background that one must understand Taylor's decision to preach and later publish his Concio ad Clerum. The intent of the sermon was twofold: (1) to determine in what moral depravity consists, and (2) to show that this depravity is by nature.[89] Moral depravity, Taylor stated, "is man's own act, consisting of a free choice of some object rather than God, as chief good; or a free preference of the world and worldly good, to the will and glory of God."[90] In saying that depravity is by nature, Taylor meant "that such is their nature, that [men] will sin and only sin in all the appropriate circumstances of their being."[91] Taylor further commented that it is not that man's nature is sinful, or that it is the efficient cause of sinning, "but that [his] nature is the occasion or reason for sinning."[92] Clearly, Taylor had abandoned the more traditional view of imputed depravity and rested the cause of man's sin on the shoulders of the individual's free choice. From this position Taylor went on to eschew the traditional orthodox view of regeneration. Just as man had the power to choose the wrong, so he had the same capacity to choose the right. "He who can make, and has made himself a wicked heart, can make, and ought to make himself a holy heart."[93] Regeneration, that is, man's turning to God, according to Taylor is not so much God acting on the passive individual whose depraved nature prevents him from acting himself, but the sinner's own act of obedience. Once again, it is evident that Taylor had further removed himself from the camp of traditional Calvinism. From within the camp, the cry was raised, "Shall we sustain our Calvinism or see it run down to the standards of Methodists and laxer men?"[94]

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[86] _Ibid_., p. 14.

[87] Mead, _Nathaniel William Taylor_, p. 145.

[88] Norton's "Thoughts on True and False Religion" appeared in _The Christian Disciple_, II (1820), 337-365. Taylor responded to Norton in his "Review of Erskine's Evidences and Norton on True and False Religion," _The Christian Spectator_, IV (1822), 249-264; 299-318. See also Smith, "Introduction," _Horace Bushnell_, pp. 15f.

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[89] Nathaniel W. Taylor, Concio ad Clerum: A Sermon Delivered in the Chapel of Yale College, September 10, 1828 (New Haven: Hezekiah Howe, 1828), p. 5. Hereafter referred to as Concio ad Clerum.

[90] Ibid., p. 10.

[91] Ibid., p. 13.

[92] Ibid., p. 14.

Neither the Consistent Calvinists, that is, the Edwardeans, nor Taylor's New Haven Theology was acceptable to American Methodism. Whereas the Edwardeans tended to speak of man as passive in the initial act of regeneration, the New Haven men made man too much the agent of his own regeneration. Both positions were viewed as detrimental to the cause of evangelical Christianity. Nathan Bangs observed that because of the prevalence of Calvinist doctrine, many who were "partially awakened" during the Methodist revivals, simply waited around for the "effectual calling" believing that their salvation was "all a matter of predestination."[95] On the other hand, the Methodist preacher became concerned over the growing tendency of the New Haven men to exhort their listeners to make of themselves a new heart.[96] Even the most fervent of the Methodist evangelists were not quite ready for that which they felt to be tinted with Pelagianism.

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[93] Nathaniel W. Taylor, Works, I (New York: Clark, Justin, and Smith, 1859), 402.

[94] Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor, p. 221.

[95] Stevens, Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D., p. 206.

At a relatively early point in his ministry, Bangs was challenged to a debate by a minister with Calvinist training. Shortly after this initial debate, Seth Williston published a volume of Sermons on Doctrinal and Experimental Subjects[97] in which he reconsidered many of the questions of the debate. Bangs, correctly interpreting Williston's writings as Edwardean, replied in The Errors of Hopkinsianism.[98] The debate continued with Williston's Vindication of Some of the Most Essential Doctrines of the Reformation[99] and Bang's response, The Reformer Reformed.[100]

Wilbur Fisk, the administrator of two of American Methodism's earliest educational institutions, Wesleyan Academy (1826-1830) and Wesleyan University (1830-1839), demonstrated an acute awareness of the contemporary theological community. Fisk's concern over the impact of Universalism has been previously noted. The Calvinism which Fisk encountered in New England was Calvinism in debate and transition. Fisk carried on polemics with both the Edwardeans and the New Haven men. In 1829 Fisk delivered an extensive address which was later published as a *Discourse on Predestination and Election*. Not until 1831 was there any serious review of the discourse. Then it was that a review appeared in the *Quarterly Christian Spectator* by a New Haven man, later identified as Dr. Eleazer T. Fitch.[101] In answer to his criticism Fisk wrote a series of articles for the *Christian Advocate* and later bound them, along with his *Discourse on Predestination and Election*, into one publication entitled, *Calvinistic Controversy*.[102]

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[96] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 202.

[97] Seth Williston, Sermons on Doctrinal and Experimental Subjects (New York: Stoddard, 1812).

[98] Nathan Bangs, The Errors of Hopkinsianism (New York: John C. Totten, 1815).

[99] Seth Williston, Vindication of Some of the Most Essential Doctrines of the Reformation (Hudson, N.Y.: Stoddard, 1817).

[100] Nathan Bangs, The Reformer Reformed (New York: John C. Totten, 1818).

Throughout the nineteenth century it is possible to trace in American Methodism an increasing consciousness of the theological community in which it functioned. As this awareness became more astute, the writings correspondingly became more formal. In the polemics which American Methodism carried on with others of varying theological points of view, the Methodists found a very faithful friend in Scottish Common Sense Philosophy.

It is difficult to pinpoint when and how American Methodism came under the influence of Scottish philosophy. Nathan Bangs is reported to have turned to the Scottish philosophers after having thoroughly studied John Locke.[103] The pattern seen in Bangs seems to have been fairly characteristic of many throughout the country. Merle Curti has observed that no writers, using the English language, were held in higher esteem than the Scottish philosophers, such as Thomas Reid and Dugald Stewart. "The appeal of Scottish philosophy," Curti wrote, "lies in the fact that for the baffling subtleties of the philosophic idealism of Berkley, the negations of Hume, and the quasi-materialism of Locke, it submitted common sense assurance of the validity of Christian morals and Christian principles generally."[104] The respect for common sense philosophy which appeared in the writings of such early American Methodists as Asa Shinn and Nathan Bangs bears out Curti's judgment. In his *Essay on the Plan of Salvation*, Shinn, having at different points in the book referred to the philosophies of Locke and Hume, stated, "It affords me unspeakable pleasure to find I can screen myself under the authority of a Reid, a Beatty, and a Campbell."[105] Commenting upon the history of philosophy in his *Letters to Young Ministers*, Bangs expressed his conviction that philosophy had reached its low ebb with Hume's "theory of successive impressions and barefaced atheism." However, Bangs wrote, "A Beattie, a Reid arose to rescue it from this fatal catastrophe, and to restore it to that reality and activity, which render it a suitable.

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[101] Eleazer T. Fitch, "Fisk on Predestination and Election," *Quarterly Christian Spectator,* III (1831), 597-640.

[102] Fisk, *Calvinistic Controversy*. The series of articles was written in 1831-1832.

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[103] Stevens, *Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D.*, p. 223.

[104] Curti, *The Growth of American Thought*, p. 236.

[105] Asa Shinn, *Essay on the Plan of Salvation* (Baltimore: Neal, Wills, and Cole, 1813), p. 109.

companion for the reasonable and active soul of man."[106] Bangs specifically advised that "Reid's Essays on the Intellectual and Active Powers of Man ought to grace the library of every Christian minister...[and] Beattie's Moral Science and Immutability of Truth should occupy the same shelf."[107]

It is not possible to say exactly to what extent the American Methodists heeded Bangs's advice. Beyond Shinn and Bangs, it is clear that Wilbur Fisk embraced some of the principles of the Scottish school. Other Methodists such as George Peck[108] and Stephen Olin[109] record having read some of the works of the Scottish thinkers. That the frequent references to "common sense" and the "dictates of reason" further evidence Methodism's awareness of the Scottish philosophers is not conclusive. The expressions may be a carry over from the Lockean school and its use of common sense. However, in that American Methodism as a whole shied away from the necessitarian tendencies of Locke's position, it is a more reasonable thesis that the frequent appeals to common sense do point to a rather widespread awareness of Scottish

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[106] Nathan Bangs, Letters to Young Ministers of the Gospel on the Importance and Method of Study (New York: Bangs and Emory, 1826), p. 84.

[107] Ibid., pp. 84f.

[108] George Peck, The Life and Times of George Peck (New York: Nelson and Phillips, 1874), p. 159.

[109] Stephen Olin, The Life and Letters of Stephen Olin, I (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1853), 29. Hereafter referred to as Life and Letters.

Common Sense Philosophy.

The leading mentor of Scottish philosophy was Thomas Reid (1710-1796), regent at King's College, Aberdeen, and later successor to Adam Smith in moral philosophy at Glasgow. His student, Dugald Stewart, was equally important as an advocate of common sense philosophy.[110] Reid defined common sense as an "inward light or sense [which is] given by heaven to different persons in different degrees." This inward sense, he continued, "is necessary to our being subjects of law and government, capable of managing our own affairs, and answerable for our conduct toward others; [and] this is called common sense because it is common to all men...."[111] He further explained that by sense he intended the meaning accorded to it in common usage, that is, judgment. Reid observed that "it is natural to think that common sense should mean common judgment; and so it really does."[112] Stewart felt that common sense, as generally understood, "is nearly synonymous with Mother-wit...and refers, not to speculative conviction of the understanding, but to that prudence and discretion which are foundations of successful conduct."[113]

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[110] See Sidney E. Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," Church History, XXIV (1955), 257-272.

[111] Quoted by S.A. Grave, The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 84.

[112] Ibid., p. 111.

[113] Ibid., p. 114.

One can readily see why such an emphasis should be so warmly embraced by the American Methodists. They were ever conscious that their ministry was directed toward the common man. The conviction of the Scottish school, that every man possessed a certain intuitive sense which enabled him to make valid judgments, accorded each individual with dignity and worth. Hence the Methodist preacher could exhort his listeners to judge the Scriptures, the message which he preached, not on the basis of what some purported scholar had said about them, but according to the dictates of their own common sense.[114]

A further emphasis characteristic of Scottish philosophy, which held great attraction for the American Methodists, was the stress upon man as a free moral agent. Reid had stated that "everything which undergoes a change must be the efficient cause of that change, or it must be changed by some other being."[115] For Reid, to speak of man as an agent is to say that he has the power to originate action. That is, man is the efficient cause of his own action. Or, to use another expression of Reid's, man possesses "a power over the determination of his own will."[116] By this Reid did not mean that there is still another faculty reigning over the will, but that the will, as the means necessary for the realization of a desired end, lies within man's power.

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[114] Shinn, "Preface," Essay on the Plan of Salvation.

[115] Quoted by Grave, The Scottish Philosophy of Common Sense, p. 210.

[116] Ibid., p. 208.

"For to say," Reid argued, "that what depends upon the will is in a man's power, but the will is not in his power, is to say that the end is in his power, but the means necessary to that end are not in his power, which is a contradiction."[117] In short, Reid contended that man as a free moral agent must be free to choose how he will act, and then be free to act as he has chosen. Such a position as this was bound to be attractive to the American Methodists who opposed the element of necessitarianism associated with traditional Calvinism. Wilbur Fisk, in language reminiscent of Reid and the Scottish school, stated that free moral agency "is the power of choice, connected with liberty to choose either good or evil. Both the power and liberty to choose either good or evil are requisite to constitute the free agency of a probationer."[118] It is clear from this that Methodism was not content to speak of liberty as merely the power to do what one pleases. True freedom must allow for the possibility of doing that which has not been willed. That is, as Nathan Bangs explained, man as a free moral agent must be understood as possessing a unique power whereby he is able "to go contrary to his previous inclination" or otherwise man "is impelled by his inclinations toward one line of action."[119]

At this point the thought of American Methodism had come close to the position of Nathaniel Taylor and the New

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[117] Ibid.

[118] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 130.

[119] Nathan Bangs, An Examination of the Doctrine of Predestination (New York: John C. Totten, 1817), p. 87.

Haven men. Taylor's recurring theme was that man as a free moral agent has "power to the contrary."[120] However, there remained a very critical distinction between Taylor's thought and that of American Methodism. In a sermon, which was later published as a doctrinal tract under the title, Man, a Free Agent without the Aids of Divine Grace, Taylor had stated that free agency consists in three faculties. These are:

> understanding, conscience, and will; by which I intend, those powers, capacities, or qualities of the soul of man by which he is [e]nabled to see the difference between good and evil, to feel accountability, and to choose good or evil, or to love one and hate the other. That the being who possesses these faculties or qualities is a free agent, is as obvious and undeniable, as that he who can perceive the difference between good and evil, and can choose between them, is free, to choose between them; in other words, that he who can choose, is free to choose.[121]

"Give these faculties to stones of the street, and they become at once free agents," he affirmed, "take them from angels and their accountability ceases."[122] From this, Taylor went on to oppose the idea that in the fall man lost his power of free agency. For Taylor this was tantamount to saying that he became something less than a man. As he explained, "understanding, conscience, and will, which make him a free agent, are constituent parts of his nature; without which he must be ranked with another species of beings."[123] Over against this American Methodism was to stress that while original sin did not mean the loss or destruction of any faculties, it did bring corruption and confusion "so as to render man incapable of a right choice without prevenient grace."[124] According to Fisk, it comes to this: "Has fallen man, on the whole, the power to make a right choice, or has he not? We say without grace he has not. And therefore fallen man is not, in the responsible sense of that term, a free agent without grace."[125]

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[120] Nathaniel W. Taylor, Works, IV (New York: Clark, Justin, and Smith, 1859), 410.

[121] Quoted by Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor, p. 111.

[122] Ibid.

American Methodism sought to stand between the two, the old traditional Calvinism and the New Divinity school. Neither position was acceptable. Traditional Calvinism had made regeneration too monergistic, whereas the synergism of the New Divinity men placed too much stress upon the activity of the natural man in effecting a relationship between God and man. With the doctrine of preventive grace, American Methodism was able to forge a middle position between the two. By the merits of the death of Jesus, grace was not only present in the moment of regeneration but also there was given to man an energizing force which enabled him to function as a free moral agent.

Early American Methodism has been considered at some length as it was related to the life and thought of nineteenth century America. It has been suggested that the evangelical message of Methodism stressed some of the themes which were characteristic of the romantic era. To a certain degree each found the other compatible. As Methodism rubbed shoulders with the new age, the romantic themes implicit in its message received new fervor. The consequent stress upon the religion of the warm heart consciously experienced by the individual was the hallmark of what is here characterized as romantic evangelicalism. In juxtaposition to these romantic tendencies, there developed within the Methodist circles an increasing awareness of the theological environment in America. In America Methodism confronted the liberal mind of Unitarianism and Universalism on the one hand, and the more rigid character of orthodox Calvinism on the other. Within the Calvinist community the New Haven group at this time was directing its efforts toward the reformulation of some of the basic doctrines of traditional Calvinism. While sharing some of the concerns of this group, American Methodists felt, however, that the New Haven men had moved too far toward a Pelagian position. Judging therefore that both Unitarians and Universalists, as well as the Calvinists, whether traditional or revisionists, were in actuality harming the cause of evangelical Christianity, American Methodism sought to channel a course which would avoid the extremes of each position and at the same time remain true to the essentials of the evangelical message. In the ensuing debates with the different viewpoints, Methodism took on a more definitive theological stance.

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[123] Ibid., p. 112.

[124] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 159.

[125] Ibid., p. 161.

It seems, then, that within American Methodism during the first half of the nineteenth century there existed the two emphases, the romantic and the polemic. The American milieu tended to intensify each aspect. Methodism was restrained, however, from an extreme expression of either by its own commitment to evangelicalism. Evangelicalism, because it is grounded upon certain essential doctrines, prevented Methodism from embracing romanticism in full bloom. Likewise, the same evangelicalism, because of its stress upon experienced religion, discouraged the rigid formulations of scholastic orthodoxy. Though bridled by the evangelical character of Methodism, the romantic and polemic dimensions remained a source of conscious tension. It was, however, precisely this tension which was to direct the course of American Methodism throughout the first part of the nineteenth century.

II. THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The legacy of John Wesley to Methodism was a basic commitment to the plain truths of evangelical Christianity. "I design plain truth for plain people," he wrote. "Therefore of set purpose, I abstain from all nice and philosophical speculations, from all perplexed and philosophical reasonings, and as far as possible, from even the show of learning...."[1] This injunction was familiar to the ministers of early American Methodism. Stephen Olin expressed the conviction that some things which had been presented from the pulpit were simply above the powers of the common man. Olin explained, "This is not the gospel,...not the vital truths of Christianity."[2] Nathan Bangs likewise felt that the pulpit was not the place for polemics. The minister must "present the truths of evangelical religion."[3]

In juxtaposition to the above concern was the belief that many of the truths of the evangelical faith were being confused and indeed threatened by the varying theological positions of the day. Bangs's writings exemplified the dilemma which faced the Methodist preachers. He was committed to plain truths, but it was precisely this commitment which prompted him to discuss the issues which he felt were critical to the cause of evangelical Christianity.[4] In this present chapter, three themes which the American Methodists felt were foundational to their evangelical message will be examined. These themes are (1) God as the Moral Governor, (2) man as the free moral agent, and (3) the person and work of Christ.

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[1] John Wesley, "Preface to Sermons," The Works of Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. by Thomas Jackson, V (3rd ed.; London: Wesleyan-Methodist Book-Room, 1831). Hereafter referred to as Works.

[2] Stephen Olin, The Works of Stephen Olin, I (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1852), 345. Hereafter referred to as Works.

[3] Stevens, Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D., p. 177.

Whereas traditional Calvinism had focused its attention and energies on the question of the sovereignty of God with respect to his eternal decrees, American Methodism turned toward man as a free moral agent. This is not to say that Methodism abrogated the sovereignty of God. Rather, Methodism was to stress that God manifested his sovereignty in a different manner, viz., by establishing a moral society over which he would rule as the Moral Governor. The concept of God as Moral Governor was basic to Methodism's emphasis upon man as a free moral agent. In order, then, to appreciate fully Methodism's salient theme, attention must first be given to the idea of God as governor over a moral society.

The traditional proofs for the existence of God on the whole are noticeably missing from the writings of early American Methodism. Like the writers of the Scriptures, the Methodists assumed his existence and proceeded from this point to describe the relationship of God to his creation. This relationship was based, not upon sovereign decrees which were held to be determinative for every individual, but upon God's decision to establish a moral community in which every creature as a free moral agent may determine his own destiny. Wilbur Fisk summarized the Methodist position as follows:

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[4] *Ibid*., p. 178.

> God, as a Sovereign, in deciding upon his works, had a right to determine on such a system as he pleased; but, being infinitely wise and good, he could of course choose, in the contemplation of all possible systems, to create such a one as, all things considered, would bring the most glory to him, and the greatest good to the universe. In infinite wisdom he decided that such a system would be a moral government, consisting of himself as the supreme and rightful governor and of intelligent subjects, having free and unrestrained power to obey or destroy the mandates of their Sovereign.[5]

God's continuing rule as governor was stressed by the Methodists. God did not simply establish a moral government and then allow it to run by itself. He maintains his divine governorship. Joseph Holdich, in an article written for The Methodist Magazine, observed that it would be absurd to suppose that a ruler would leave a kingdom which he has established without some form of rule, or that a skilled master, who, having trimmed his sails, would then leave his ship to the whim of the seas. "And can we suppose," he continued, "that the Almighty, after forming this beautiful, mundane fabric and ordaining a constitution founded on the wisest and best principles, should abandon the government of it, and leave the whole in a state of anarchy and confusion? This seems utterly incredible."[6] Holdich affirmed that a careful examination of the ever developing order in the universe brings one to the same point, viz., that there is a wise and benevolent governor.[7]

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[5] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 38.

God, then, as governor over his creation was viewed as totally related to it. But what of his relation to the moral creatures, the subjects of his moral government? As a free moral agent, Methodism affirmed that man was not determined by God. Yet, clearly God was not indifferent toward man. Man was given certain moral aids, such as the ability to determine between right and wrong, and a conscience which condemns the wrong, to enable him to live in accord with the demands of a moral society. However, such aids have not ruled out the possibility of moral evil. Man's innate power of choice implied the possibility of sin. This was the great risk of the moral creation. Wilbur Fisk, however, explained that if man should sin, it would not be by divine decree, or by circumstances, but through his own choice.[8]

From the Methodist perspective the moral government as established by God neither sacrificed the unique character of man as a free moral agent, nor threatened the status of God as the divine ruler. Indeed, the moral government at every point was seen as agreeing with the attributes of God.

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[6] Joseph Holdich, "The Government of God," The Methodist Magazine, XI (1828), 242.

[7] Ibid., p. 243.

[8] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 39.

> The Almighty's government is _just_ because it secures the rights of all beings in existence, it is _good_, because its native tendency is to promote the happiness of all intelligent creatures,...it is _true_, because it has no tendency to deceive, but gives a correct view of the nature of God, of the way in which happiness is to be enjoyed. Therefore, it is _holy_, because it supports every moral principle.[9]

Furthermore, as Asa Shinn pointed out, the concept of a moral government actually underscored the dignity of God. "Does it not take more wisdom to govern a society of free agents," Shinn asked, "than to govern a complicated machine, such as a watermill, a cotton factory, or a steam boat?"[10]

The Methodists judged that the position commonly promulgated by traditional Calvinism concerning the doctrine of sovereign decrees or predestination was an affront to the very nature of God and the dignity of man. Fisk criticized at some length the Calvinist doctrine of sovereign decrees. In the first place, he argued, the sovereign decrees in actuality make God the author of sin. Traditional Calvinism denied the substance of this accusation, contending that while God determined that man should act, he did not determine that man's act should be a sinful act. It was, according to the Calvinists, not God, but man's natural depravity which turns man's action toward sin. This, asserted Fisk, was merely playing with words.[11] Further, the doctrine of predestination destroys man's free agency. Fisk noted that Calvinism objected to this criticism as well, stating that man sins voluntarily because he wills to sin and that the same individual may repent if he so wills. Fisk was quick to point out that Calvinism traditionally held that only those who are the elect and hence under the influence of divine grace are able to will to turn to God.[12] Still another argument enumerated by Fisk was that the doctrine of predestination arrays the decrees of God over against his word. On the one hand man was commanded not to sin, and on the other he was predestined to commit evil.[13] Finally, the idea of sovereign decrees is counter to the moral attributes of God. If God held man responsible for what was unavoidable, how then can one speak of him as just and merciful?[14] In another context Fisk asserted that the judgment of common sense was clearly against the concept of predestination. "Is there so much evidence in favor of predestination," he asked, "that I should do more violence to my own reason, and the laws of belief, by rejecting it, than I should by believing that this doctrine is compatible with free agency and accountability?"[15]

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[9] Shinn, _Essay on the Plan of Salvation_, p. 147.

[10] Asa Shinn, _The Supreme Being_ (Philadelphia: James Kay and Brother, 1840), p. 198.

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[11] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 19.

[12] Ibid., p. 21.

[13] Ibid., p. 22.

[14] Ibid., p. 23.

[15] Ibid., p. 136.

In place of the God of sovereign decrees Methodism posited the God of a moral society. Only in this context was it possible to talk in meaningful terms about man as a free moral agent. A recurring theme throughout the Methodist writings was an emphasis upon the uniqueness of man as God's highest creation. This uniqueness consisted in the fact that man was created in the image of God. For Methodism this implied that "man in a subordinate sphere has the power of originating thought and spontaneous moral action."[16] That is, man was a free moral agent. Methodism seemed never to tire of stressing, in one way or another, this basic conviction. To deny the free agency of man would be to go against the "laws of natural and revealed religion" and the "principles of common sense."[17]

Wilbur Fisk was one of the early American Methodists who went to some length to stress the liberty of the individual. His definition of free moral agency was quite representative for the whole of Methodism. "It is," he observed, "the power of choice, connected with the liberty to choose either good or evil."[18] Shinn agreed with Fisk, "The proper notion of power," he commented, "is the liberty of option, to perform an action, or to omit the performance of it."[19] Nathan Bangs affirmed, in accord with the above definitions, that man possesses "a gracious power" whereby he is able "to go contrary" to his previous inclincations. This power is that which constitutes man as a free agent.[20]

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[16] Ibid., p. 158.

[17] Laurence Kean, A Plain and Positive Refutation of the Rev. Samuel Petton's Unjust and Unfounded Charges entitled "Absurdities of Methodism" (New York: J. and J. Harper, 1823), p. 216. Hereafter referred to as A Plain and Positive Refutation.

[18] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 130.

The affirmation that man is a free moral agent, according to the Methodists, goes beyond the idea that he who is able to choose is free to choose. That is to say, free agency implies more than the mere power to initiate a given response. American Methodism joined with Nathaniel Taylor to assert that free moral agency meant that man in a particular situation has the power to choose other than he has chosen. Or, to use Taylor's famous expression, man has "power to the contrary."[21] Taylor summed up this situation as follows:

> If freedom to will is predictable of man it must mean freedom to choose otherwise in the same circumstances, [and] he is not a free agent who possesses merely the power to choose otherwise had the antecedents been different, or to choose otherwise when the antecedents are different. If one has not the power to choose otherwise than this present choice with the same antecedents, he is not a free agent, for there is no power to the contrary, nor any power to will in any circumstances.[22]

The similarity between the statements made by the American Methodists and Nathaniel Taylor are quite apparent.

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[19] Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 329.

[20] Bangs, An Examination of the Doctrine of Predestination, p. 87.

[21] Taylor, Works, IV, 410.

[22] From a manuscript, "Notes on Taylor's Lectures," quoted by Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor, p. 212.

Both Methodism and Taylor were calling into question the Edwardean understanding of freedom of the will. The Edwardeans had followed the course prescribed by Jonathan Edwards. In his consideration of the freedom of the will, Edwards had focused on the act of willing alone. He argued that whether a man was determined in his actions by some prior cause or no cause at all has no relevance to the question of freedom. Freedom of the will, he explained, "is power, opportunity or advantage, that anyone has to do as he pleases." Or in other words, he continued, it is "his being free from hinderance or impediments in the way of doing, or conducting in any respect, as he wills."[23] In short, man is free to do what he wills to do.[24]

In the specific act of willing there was, according to Edwards, a tendency of the mind in one direction or another. This does not mean that there is an indifferent deliberation over alternatives. To suppose such is to imply that the mind is not at the point of making a choice. For, in the act of volition there can be only one choice, and that must be in accord with that toward which the mind is directed. As he explained, "the will is always as the greatest apparent good, or as what appears most agreeable [i.e., most agreeable or pleasing to the mind]."[25] It is absurd, then, Edwards asserted, "to suppose the will, at present, to be otherwise than, at present, it is."[26]

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[23] Jonathan Edwards, Freedom of the Will, ed. by Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 163.

[24] Paul Ramsey, "Introduction," in Jonathan Edwards, Freedom of the Will, ed. by Paul Ramsey (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957), p. 13.

[25] Edwards, Freedom of the Will, p. 144.

By focusing on the specific act of volition, Edwards was able to defend the doctrine of freedom of the will. For him, liberty implied

> the power and opportunity for one to do and conduct as he wills or according to his choice, [and this] is all that is meant by it, without taking into the meaning of the word, anything of the cause or origin of that choice, or at all considering how the person came to have such a volition; whether it was caused by some external motive, or internal habitual bias; whether it was determined by some internal antecedent volition, or whether it happened without a cause; whether it was necessarily connected with something foregoing, or not connected. Let the person come by his volition or choice how he will, yet, if he is able, and there is nothing in the way to hinder his pursuing and executing his will, the man is fully and perfectly free, according to the primary and common notion of freedom.[27]

American Methodism did not accept Edwards' view of freedom of the will. Methodism was quick to point out that the Edwardean understanding of motive control which channeled the mind in a given direction prevented a proper understanding of freedom of the will. It was judged inadequate to simply say that a person is free to choose as he wills when what he wills has been determined by the strongest motive or the most apparent good. Methodist writers did not wish to put down the significance of motives, but only to contend that the individual has a power whereby he is able to make himself independent of the motives. That is, he may go against his motives.

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[26] *Ibid.*, p. 161.

[27] *Ibid.*, p. 164.

The Edwardean position on the freedom of the will had strongly been influenced by Lockean philosophy. Methodism, on the whole, in its emphasis upon man as a free agent turned away from John Locke to the common sense philosophy of Thomas Reid. From the previous discussion of Reid's position,[28] it is recalled that for Reid, free will implied a certain power or control over the determinations of the will, i.e., it is not sufficient enough to say that the man who is free is the man who has the power to do what he chooses to do. Rather, true freedom implies that in a given set of circumstances, a person has such control over his will as to be able to determine a different pattern of action than that which he chooses to follow. This emphasis found expression in the writings of early American Methodism.

The full intent of Methodism's basic conviction, perhaps, can best be seen by drawing attention to what is implicit in each word of the phrase, "free moral agent." First of all, man is a free moral agent. To say that man is an agent is to affirm that man has the power to act, and this further means, that he has the power to originate his own actions. Or, in other words, man as an agent is the efficient cause of his own actions. "It must be evident to every person of reflection," wrote Laurence Kean, "that the mind is possessed of a power of commencing action, or of exerting acts of its will, by the energy God has lodged within it."[29] This basic theme was repeated again and again.

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[28] See chap. i, pp. 46ff.

[29] Kean, A Plain and Positive Refutation, p. 233.

> There is no truth of which every man is more certain than this, that he has within him a self-determining principle, and that if he were irresistibly forced to act, he could not be a free agent, and therefore not accountable for his conduct.[30]

The power to act, asserted Asa Shinn, "is the power to determine the action."[31] In the second place, man is a free moral agent. In any given situation man has the power to act in one way or the other. For this reason, man's actions take on moral dimensions. Moral character demands real options of choice. "To deny this principle," Shinn remarked, "is to demolish the foundation of all moral distinctions, and to open a wide door of atheism to the world."[32] Nathan Bangs observed that traditional Calvinism's emphasis upon power to do what one wills to do leaves much to be desired. A most essential aspect of free agency is a "power to choose among a variety of objects...without being compelled by an extraneous power; and also,...a power to do or not to do, good or evil."[33] Then, finally, man is a free moral agent. Bangs spoke for the whole of American Methodism when he stated that liberty "may be indeed considered one of the most evident maxims in the philosophy of the human mind."[34] Wilbur Fisk concurred in this judgment. However, he observed, speculative philosophy, under the influence of Lockean principles, had tended to obscure this truth. John Locke's emphasis upon the significance of motives had greatly influenced the prominent idea of freedom as set forth by Jonathan Edwards, i.e., as discussed previously, man responds freely to that which appears as the good. However, this for Fisk was not true liberty. Freedom implies, according to Fisk, that the mind has the power to make itself "independent of motives."[35] Or, in other words, the mind "is conscious of its control over motives."[36] The sum of the question is this:

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[30] Ibid., p. 240.

[31] Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 330.

[32] Ibid., p. 321.

[33] Bangs, The Reformer Reformed, p. 38.

[34] Bangs, An Examination of the Doctrine of Predestination, p. 82.

> Has the mind a self-determining power, by which it can spontaneously decide, independent of the control of motives, or is the mind absolutely controlled by motives?[37]

Clearly, with Fisk, it is the former. Here Fisk has repeated in essence the theme underscored by Thomas Reid and the Scottish philosophers.[38] The emphasis upon the self-determining power of the will was characteristic of a number of American Methodists. Liberty, observed Nathan Bangs, is the power to choose among a number of objects "without being compelled by an extraneous power;...."[39] Laurence Kean noted that the will, "instead of - in all cases - being determined by the strongest motive, or the last motive in [the] view of the mind,...is free in acting...[and also] possesses the power of determining in the face of interests...."[40] Or again, "No one," stated Peter Sandford, "is an agent who has not the liberty to act,...and liberty to perform a given action presupposes the liberty to leave that action unperformed...."[41] To be a free moral agent is to be at liberty to determine one's course of action in one direction or another under a given set of circumstances and then to follow it.

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[35] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 139.

[36] Ibid., p. 154.

[37] Ibid., p. 139.

[38] See chap. i, pp. 46ff.

[39] Bangs, The Reformer Reformed, p. 38.

The shift from an emphasis upon the sovereignty of God to a concern for the free agency of man is clearly evident in Methodist thought of this period. American Methodism was to stress that only in the framework of moral government and moral agents was it possible to avoid a position which implicated God for man's sin. Only in this context could one speak in meaningful terms about man's sin and his recovery. Methodism judged that the difficulty in which much of the talk about moral evil was encased was due to the fact that such discussion traditionally had taken place in the context of sovereign decrees. However, Asa Shinn observed, "admit that intelligent creatures are really agents,...and then the mystery of original sin amounts only to this - that a free agent acted wrong when he ought to have acted right, by imbibing the vain delusion, that he would thereby, in some way or other, better his condition."[42] Indeed, had not man been liable to the possibility of sin he could not have been considered a free agent. Stephen Olin summed up the matter:

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[40] Kean, A Plain and Positive Refutation, p. 216.

[41] Peter Sandford, "Salvation by Faith," The Methodist Preacher (Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853), p. 196. See also, Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 329.

> I see...that if I were not liable to sin, I could have no probation, and form no moral character, to both of which free agency is necessary. The Gospel presupposed this liability. Had God permitted none to live whom He foresaw would sin, there could have been no such race as that of men; no trial - no rewards - no virtue nor piety, the very essence of which is free agency.[43]

Adam, the first man, acted as a free moral agent. By a gracious act, God established a physical order of beauty for the first man. Adam, whose stay in the garden was said to be a period of probation was to live in accord with the divine law which governed the universe. However, Adam, by his own act of disobedience, transgressed the divine law.[44] The consequence of Adam's disobedience was that the moral image of God in Adam was distorted so as to prevent Adam from functioning properly as a free moral agent.[45]

American Methodism affirmed that Adam was the representative of the whole race. This was a consistent theme throughout Methodist writings. However, there was an effort to narrow the more traditional view of Adam as the representative man. Protestant orthodoxy of the eighteenth century had held that Adam was both the natural and federal head of all mankind. As to the natural head of the whole race, the depravity or corruption which Adam experienced through his own sin was passed on to his posterity through natural generation. As to the federal head of the people, Adam represented all mankind in a legal sense, and the guilt, which he incurred through his disobedience, was transferred or imputed to all mankind. While John Wesley apparently embraced such a position,[46] the twofold character of Adam's headship was more commonly associated with traditional Calvinism.[47] Methodism in America was to distinguish itself from Calvinism, as well as from John Wesley, by centering on Adam as the natural head of the race. While some references may be found which mention Adam as the "federal head" of the race, a number of the leading spokesmen within early American Methodism directed the course of Methodist thinking away from this theme.[48] The idea of imputation of guilt, which was the consequent theme of the federal headship position, was judged to be an offence to common sense. Asa Shinn, for one, reasoned that "no one would conclude that our children would really be to blame for what was done by national authority before they were born. Shall we infer," he continued, "that because they have the consequences of their rulers' actions, they equally share in the guilt thereof?"[49] Guilt, Shinn argued,"is inseparable from some criminal action, knowingly and willingly performed by the guilty person."[50] This was the crux of the matter. "To say that one is liable to suffer for the offence of another is not to say that the one who suffers is guilty by consequence of the offence of the other."[51]

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[42] Shinn, Supreme Being, p. 143.

[43] Olin, Life and Letters, II, 72.

[44] Bangs, The Reformer Reformed, p. 57.

[45] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 161.

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[46] Wesley, Works, IX, 332,379f.

[47] See H. Shelton Smith, Changing Conceptions of Original Sin (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), pp. 6f.

[48] Thomas A. Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1852), p. 206; see also James Quinn, "The Natural and Spiritual Man," Sermons on Miscellaneous Subjects by the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Senior Preachers of the Ohio and North Ohio Conferences (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1853), p. 122.

Asa Shinn, then, along with Bangs, Fisk, Merritt, et al., was to affirm that man experienced the consequences of Adam's sin in terms of natural depravity. That is, from Adam, man has received inherent propensities toward evil. The consequence of Adam's first sin was not the loss of any faculty. Rather, as a result of that first sin, the faculties "were deprived of much of their original energy," and consequently became "directed toward improper objects."[52] This depraved status was passed on to Adam's posterity through natural generation.[53] Man, then, received from Adam native depravity, but not native demerit.

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[49] Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 295.

[50] Ibid., p. 299.

[51] Ibid., p. 303.

[52] Bangs, The Reformer Reformed, p. 133.

[53] Ibid.

As noted above, it seems that in respect to the general question of sin and depravity, there were those among the American Methodists, even at this early stage, who were moving away from the original Wesleyan position. Robert Chiles, in his study, Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935, summarized Wesley's view of sin and depravity as follows:

> All men are totally corrupt! they are 'children of wrath' and subjects of divine displeasure. Prior to any act of his own, each man shares in the depravity and guilt of Adam's sin. In general, Wesley suggests that man inherits depravity through physical generation and that he is the subject of guilt through representative participation in Adam's transgression.[54]

There is, as Chiles acknowledged, some difference of opinion regarding whether or not Wesley attributed original guilt to all mankind.[55] Chiles, it seems, has correctly represented the original Wesleyan position in stating that Wesley believed that man by virtue of Adam's transgression experienced not only native depravity but also shared in the guilt of his sin. Beyond explicit references to the imputation of Adam's guilt,[56] such expressions as "children of wrath" who are

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[54] Chiles, Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935, p. 118.

[55] Ibid., p. 119. Harald Lindstrom doubted that Wesley held to a full blown idea of the imputation of guilt. See Harald Lindstrom, Wesley and Sanctification (Stockholm: Nya Bokforlags Aktiebotaget, 1946), pp. 34f. See David Shipley for a discussion of the concept of original guilt in the Arminian and Wesley traditions. David C. Shipley, "Methodist Arminianism in the Theology of John Fletcher," Unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Yale University, 1942, pp. 176ff.

[56] Wesley, Works, IX, 332,379f.

"liable to death"[57] strongly suggest original guilt. This was held to be man's plight before he was able to respond in any manner.[58] During the first half of the nineteenth century, a significant number of American Methodists made an honest attempt to draw the line between native depravity and native demerit, contending that the former rested upon all men because of their natural relationship to Adam, but that the latter was contingent upon man's own act of disobedience.[59]

It must be said at this point that it was not the intent of these early American Methodists to call into question their own tradition. Methodism's new emphasis in America was forged as a result of its confrontation with Calvinism in the new world. American Methodism judged that traditional Calvinism was shackled with too many sticky problems. For one thing, Calvinism faced the problem of correlating the fact of original sin with a God of sovereign decrees. It was suggested by some within the Calvinist camp, viz., the Hopkinsians,[60] that sin was in fact necessary in order that

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[57] Ibid., VII, 277.

[58] Albert Outler, ed., John Wesley (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. 324.

[59] There were exceptions to this trend. James Quinn, for example, stated that man as the offspring of Adam is under the sentence of death. Here Quinn repeated John Wesley's theme. Quinn, "The Natural and Spiritual Man," Sermons on Miscellaneous Subjects by the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Senior Preachers of the Ohio and North Ohio Conferences, p. 124.

[60] This group received its name from its mentor, Samuel Hopkins, one of the men who reinterpreted the writings of Jonathan Edwards. Hudson, Religion in America, p. 114.

God might demonstrate his mercy. This, as Asa Shinn observed, was "to argue that a physician must break an arm of a patient to demonstrate his skill in curing it."[61] Equally awkward from the Methodist point of view was the idea of immediate imputation of Adam's guilt upon all his posterity. This was an affront to the justice of God as well as to the dignity of man, and defied the principles of common sense.

Representative voices within American Methodism joined with Nathaniel Taylor in criticizing the traditional Calvinist understanding of sin and depravity. While sympathetic with Taylor to a degree, they refused to go all the way with him. Both parties, on the one hand, agreed that Adam's guilt could not be transferred to the race. Guilt came upon each person through his own act of disobedience. On the other hand, the Methodists differed from Taylor in that they held to the position that depravity was a corruption of the moral constitution. Taylor, in his famous Concio ad Clerum, stated that depravity did not rest upon constitutional propensities in man's nature but in man's own free act toward some object other than God.[62] Man's nature was said to be the occasion for sinning.[63] Francis Hodgson judged that Taylor's position was weak in that it defined depravity merely in terms of "a want of willingness" toward God and failed to take into account the constitutional character of depravity.[64] With an awareness of the positions taken by both wings of Calvinism, the leading spokesmen of early American Methodism developed their own understanding of depravity, consciously seeking to avoid what were felt to be the shortcomings of each position.

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[61] Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 275.

[62] Taylor, Concio ad Clerum, p. 10.

[63] Ibid., p. 14.

What then was the general understanding of human depravity? Human depravity did not consist in any imputed demerit because of the sin of one universal man as suggested by traditional Calvinism. Nor did it reside merely in the act of each individual as held by Taylor. Further, depravity, while said to have constitutional dimensions, must not be thought of in terms of a faculty of the soul. Rather, it points to an inherent corruption in the faculties constituting a principle of action.[65] It was commonly stated that man's understanding was darkened, his will perverted, and his affections debauched.[66] Or again, depravity was described in analogical terms as a disease which has weakened the faculties of the individual. It was asserted that depravity does not mean the loss of any faculty. Wilbur Fisk stressed that the faculties have not been destroyed, but have been so corrupted "as to render man incapable of a right choice.... It is," continued Fisk, "a matter of weakening of the faculties by virtue of a moral disease...just as a physical faculty must be weakened by a physical disease."[67] This deprivation, according to Fisk, brought about a disorder in the faculties of the soul. In short, Fisk commented, "the soul has become essentially disordered by sin...."[68] This last statement points to the most basic aspect of human depravity. The Methodist writers understood original righteousness to imply that all the faculties of the individual were functioning properly, which meant that the understanding or intellect held sway over will and passion. Homer J. Clarke, in rhetoric characteristic of the sermons of the day, described the original status of man.

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[64] Francis Hodgson, An Examination of the System of New Divinity or New School Theology (New York: Mason and Lane, 1839), pp. 75,77.

[65] Ibid., p. 102.

[66] Timothy Merritt, "The Nature and Necessity of the New Birth," The Methodist Preacher (Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853), p. 59. See also, Tobias Spicer, The Way from Sin to Sanctification, Holiness, and Heaven (4th ed.; New York: Carlton and Porter, 1857), p. 19. Hereafter referred to as The Way from Sin to Sanctification. See also, Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 161.

> The understanding, like an incorruptible judge, was free from all influences that might prevent its right and truthful exercise; conscience, like a vigilant and trusty sentinel, was quick to discern and faithful to report, the most distant approaches of moral evil; while the will, as a faithful executive, instantly accomplished what had been determined by the reason and the moral faculty. Like innocent and virtuous children, our first parents found their greatest happiness in conforming to the will of their heavenly father, whom they loved with supreme perfection.[69]

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[67] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 160. See also Hodgson, An Examination of the System of New Divinity or New School Theology, p. 102.

[68] Ibid.

[69] Homer J. Clarke, "The Nature, Condition, and Destiny of Man," The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit, collected and revised by Davis W. Clark, ed. by George Peck (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1848), p. 50.

One could legitimately ask how or why such a person sinned in the first place. It must in all fairness be said that the Methodists were not overly concerned with the "how" or "why", but with the fact. At most, as noted above, sin, Adam's and every man's, was the risk implicit in the free moral agency of man. While the above quotation from Clarke may raise some questions which were not fully answered in Methodist thinking, it does, however, set the stage for a more explicit idea of Methodism's view of depravity. Man's present condition is that "a sacrilegious usurpation" has subverted "the divine order of the soul."[70] Conscience, that moral faculty which resides in the intellect, no longer has any say over the affections.[71] Indeed, the affections represent the principle seat of man's depravity. They have gained the upper hand. The will, which normally functions as that unifying force in the individual, has, by the ascendency of the affections, been ruled ineffective. The whole harmony has been disrupted.[72] Such is the condition of the natural man in sin.

It is clear from the above examination that American Methodism viewed human depravity in the most serious terms. Indeed, Wilbur Fisk, for one, described depravity in terms as grave as those ever used by traditional Calvinism. Fisk wrote that "the sin of Adam introduced into his nature such radical impotence and depravity that it is impossible for his descendants [who, it was believed, were propagated in the moral likeness of their fallen ancestors] to make any voluntary efforts toward piety and virtue, or in any respect to correct and improve their moral and religious character."[73] Clearly, man's free moral agency had been marred.[74] Nathaniel Taylor's emphasis upon man as a free moral agent apart from grace was wholly unacceptable to Fisk. However, in his effort to avoid the emphasis of the New Haven school, is it not appropriate to ask whether or not Fisk had joined hands with traditional Calvinism? The language is similar. Each underscored the inability of the natural man to turn toward righteousness. To be sure, traditional Calvinism had affirmed that the guilt of Adam had been imparted to all mankind. The Methodist writers on the whole made every effort to avoid such an assertion. Yet in their stress upon man's total depravity, which made it impossible for him to initiate a response toward God, had not Fisk and his fellow Methodists in effect placed man in the position of being condemned for a condition which he cannot correct? The Methodist answer to this apparent dilemma was the idea of prevenient grace. Just as the distinction between natural and moral inability characterized the Edwardeans, and the phrase "power to the contrary" marked Nathaniel Taylor, and his New Haven men, the theme of prevenient grace or gracious ability was the watchword of American Methodism. The emphasis, unique to the Wesleyan tradition, enabled American Methodism to charter a course between traditional Calvinism and the New Haven men. Taylor, in defining the New Haven position with respect to grace and free agency, had argued that man apart from grace is still a free moral agent. Otherwise, according to Taylor, one would be faced with the alternative that without grace man is something less than human. As noted previously, Taylor stated that man's free agency consisted in three faculties, viz., understanding, conscience, and will.[75] These faculties are present in the natural man. Wilbur Fisk agreed that these faculties are present, but he argued that their presence does not necessarily assure free moral agency in the full sense of the word.

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[70] Ibid., p. 51.

[71] Merritt, "The Nature and Necessity of the New Birth," The Methodist Preacher, p. 59.

[72] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 243.

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[73] _Ibid_., p. 182.

[74] _Ibid_., p. 160.

> To say a fallen man has natural power to make a right choice, because he has faculties of his mind entire, is the same as to say that a paralytic man has natural power to walk, because he has his limbs entire.[76]

Fisk reiterated the same objection against Taylor and the New Haven men in a somewhat different manner in another context. Turning to the seventh chapter of Romans, Fisk recalled Paul's confession as to his inability to do what he ought to do. In response to Paul's question, "Who shall deliver me from this body of death?" (Rom. 7:24), Fisk chided:

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[75] See chap. i, p. 49.

[76] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 161.

> Why, Saul of Tarsus, are you not conscious that you have understanding, conscience, and will? Why make such an exclamation? Who shall deliver you? Deliver yourself.[77]

This, noted Fisk, is what the New Haven men would have said to Paul. But Fisk concluded "such philosophy and such theology...was not known to Paul."[78]

It would seem at this point that Fisk had aligned his position with the emphasis characteristic of Edwardean Calvinism. The Edwardeans maintained that sin had not canceled out man's natural ability to turn to God, but had made it morally impossible for man to make such a response. Or, to state the problem in different words, original sin did not destroy the natural faculties of the individual so as to make him any less human, but it has so corrupted them as to render it impossible for the individual to initiate any response toward God. Man cannot turn toward God apart from the aid of divine grace.[79] While Fisk stated that the distinction between natural ability and moral inability was meaningless[80], yet it is clear that he, along with the Calvinists, argued the inability of man unassisted by grace to turn toward God. Here, as John Wesley said of himself, Methodists came "within a hair's breadth of Calvinism."[81]

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[77] Ibid., p. 202.

[78] Ibid.

[79] Mead, Nathaniel William Taylor, p. 116.

[80] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 161.

[81] Wesley, Works, VIII, 284.

Fisk, as well as the whole of American Methodism, however, was to maintain a unique position by his insistence upon gracious ability. By virtue of prevenient grace, which was the possession of all mankind and not restricted to the elect alone, man was qualified to function as a free moral agent in the full meaning of the word.

It should be noted at this point that Fisk, along with his cohorts, was speaking in qualified terms. Man's free agency was restricted by Adam's sin, but not completely destroyed. It is limited in the sense that apart from grace man is not capable of turning toward God. Man does continue to make decisions, to exercise preferences, and in this sense is a free agent. But these decisions and preferences do not necessarily imply moral responsibility. There is no moral responsibility where there is no real choice between good and evil. Apart from grace, man is free only in respect to evil. Hence, he is not a free moral agent in the true meaning of the word. However, that which man lost because of sin, viz., the ability to turn to God, has been restored through prevenient grace. Prevenient grace enables the individual to freely be the man toward God. "What no man has by nature," Thomas Morris wrote, "all have by grace," viz., "the power to choose and accept life."[82] Nathan Bangs likewise affirmed that all of Adam's posterity "are more or less favored with the merciful visitations of grace previous to regeneration, by which the energies of the soul are strengthened, and they are capacitated to repent and believe in their benevolent redeemer."[83]

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[82] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 69.

It is evident from the above definitions that gracious ability, as understood by the Methodists, is present to all mankind and so enlivens the faculties of the individual as to constitute him a free moral agent in the most complete sense. Only in this context, Methodism asserted, can there be talk about responsibility. For, as Bangs noted, it is a disservice to God to hold that he would condemn a person who does not have the ability to perform what has been commanded. It is comparable to requesting that a child bring a glass of water when there is no water available.[84] Within the framework of gracious ability, man may justly be held responsible for that which he does not do. If man does not turn to God, it is not because he has not the power, but rather, it is by virtue of his choice to reject God's gracious offer of salvation. Gracious ability was not thought of in terms of overriding man's free agency, i.e., man, like the first man, may still misuse his free agency. He may turn against God. "The sinner and the saint," Bangs explained, "have it in their power to resist this gracious influence...."[85] Whatever man's choice, he is responsible for it, precisely because it is within man's capacity to make a real choice. Every individual is so empowered by virtue of prevenient grace.

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[83] Bangs, The Reformer Reformed, p. 134; cf. Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 182.

[84] Bangs, The Reformer Reformed, p. 143.

[85] Ibid., p. 40.

In the course of this chapter references have been cited which reveal that American Methodists viewed native depravity in very serious terms. The faculties of the mind, though not destroyed, are weakened and disordered. Hence, while man remains a free agent, his free agency is limited. Yet, through the universal gift of prevenient grace, man is a free moral agent in the true sense of the word. He is able to choose for the right or for the wrong. He may respond to the call of God or reject it. In view of this latter emphasis upon the universal character of gracious ability, one cannot help but ask whether or not Methodism's emphasis upon the serious nature of native depravity is rather meaningless. Is not, for example, Fisk's talk about inability empty talk in view of his strong emphasis upon gracious ability? The emphasis is not peculiar to American Methodism alone. John Wesley stated that while "all the souls of men are dead in sin by nature,...there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God."[86] Does not, then, the presence of prevenient grace in all mankind cancel out native depravity? The Methodist answer is no. The point which must be underscored is that for the Methodists, as will be discussed in a later context, prevenient grace is not saving grace. It represents but a certain degree of grace, sufficient to enable the individual to act freely for good or for evil. While, then, no man is destitute of grace, still all men remain by nature sinful. Prevenient grace has not canceled out the consequences of man's first sin, though these consequences have been alleviated to the degree that man is enabled to act as a free moral agent in the true meaning of the word. He may freely choose God and live. He may freely choose to go against God. At the moment when man chooses to go against God, he incurs guilt, i.e., it is in this conscious moment of rejection that man existentially experiences his native depravity.

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[86] Quoted by William R. Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 100.

Prevenient grace or gracious ability was presented as an unconditional benefit of the atonement. Bangs expressed the conviction of the whole of American Methodism when he wrote that the concept of gracious ability "grows out of that true proposition of the gospel, namely, that Christ, by his death and suffering has made salvation possible to all men."[87] It is now appropriate to turn to Methodism's understanding of the person and work of Christ.

John Deschner, in his study of Wesley's Christology, observed that John Wesley shared in the "protestant mistrust of abstract Christology."[88] This conviction is equally applicable to early American Methodists. Methodism, whether in England or America, purposed to present the plain truths of the Christian message for the redemption and edification of the common man. Rather than entering into an involved theological pronouncement, the Methodist preacher was more apt to hold up before the people certain mysteries which one cannot fully understand, but receives by faith.

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[87] Ibid., p. 319.

[88] John Deschner, Wesley's Christology (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1960), p. 14.

American Methodism, in keeping with the Western religious tradition since the Reformation, focused to a greater degree on the work of Christ. This emphasis upon the work of Christ was at the very heart of their message. "The great foundation on which our hopes of salvation must rest," Tobias Spicer explained, "is what God has done for us in giving of his Son, Jesus Christ, to die for us."[89] However, as is clear by this statement, it is very difficult to separate work of Christ from the person of Christ. Indeed, any distinction must be arbitrary. One aspect accompanies the other. Christology faithfully reflects soteriology, and vice versa. Timothy Merritt stated that "the doctrine of the atonement and that of the divinity of Christ stand or fall together. If we give up the divinity of Christ we cannot support the atonement;...."[90]

The concern which is reflected here in the statement by

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[89] Tobias Spicer, "Grace and Works United," The Methodist Preacher (Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853), p. 169.

[90] Timothy Merritt, "A Discourse on Future Punishment," The Methodist Magazine, VI (1823), 243. This theme will be explicated in a later context.

Merritt had characterized Methodism from the days of the English revivals. The frequent statements in the writings of American Methodism pertaining to the person and work of Christ, however, represent more than a mere repetition of the Wesleyan emphasis. Methodism's confrontation with liberal Unitarianism and Universalism underscored the need to restate the traditional understanding of the person and work of Christ. It is against this background, then, that one can appreciate the numerous sermons and works which focused on the person and/or work of Christ.[91]

A proper examination of Methodism's understanding demands that attention first be directed toward the person of Christ. For, as Laban Clark explained, "It is only in proportion as we have the right views of the person and character of the Savior, that we can have just views of the atonement he has made."[92] While calling for a "right view" of the person of

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[91] In *The Methodist Preacher* (Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853), for example, sermons which concern the person and/or work of Christ include the following: Laban Clark, "The Nature and Design of the Atonement," pp. 285-297; J.P. Durbin, "Character and Mission of Jesus Christ," pp. 237-265; Tobias Spicer, "Grace and Works United," pp. 168-176. Timothy Merritt, in an article published in *The Methodist Magazine*, focused on this critical subject. See "An Essay on Atonement," VII (1824), 201-209; 241-251. John Emory wrote at some length in defense of the deity of Christ in his work, *The Divinity of Christ, Vindicated from the Cavils and Observations of Mr. John Wright* (Philadelphia: T. and W. Bradford, 1819). Asa Shinn, in his *Essay on the Plan of Salvation*, gave extensive attention to the nature of the atonement.

[92] Clark, "The Nature and Design of the Atonement," *The Methodist Preacher*, p. 169.

Christ, there was, as Clark observed, no need to embark in the "sea of philosophical examination."[93] That is, the individual need not be able to grasp how there can be three persons in one Godhead, or two natures in one person, Jesus Christ. The correct view of Christ requires that one should simply concur that in Christ there is a union of the two natures, the divine and human.[94] In actuality, the union denies explanation precisely because it is a mystery.

> It is a mystery that angels pry into, and adore with astonishment, how the eternal, only begotten Son of God should assume flesh to himself in so close and intimate conjunction; that though he be eternal, yet he should be born; though he be immortal, yet he should truly die; and though he were dead, yet he should raise himself to life again. These things did truly come to pass through the miraculous union [of two persons].[95]

The deity of Christ is a constant theme throughout the writings of American Methodism. The manner in which the deity of Christ was underscored reveals the awareness among the Methodists of the liberal themes in America during this period. For example, J.P. Durbin, in a sermon entitled, "Character and Mission of Jesus Christ," considered the Unitarian theme that while Jesus was above all men, yet he was inferior to God.[96] Durbin reasoned that Christ could not even be considered a good man, let alone superior to man, if he assumed the prerogatives of God, yet was not God. Further, in that Jesus was throughout the Scriptures presented as an object of worship, and in that worship belongs to God alone, it followed for Durbin, that Jesus must be God.[97] Bishop John Emory followed the same line of reasoning in his defense of the deity of Christ which he wrote in response to the "cavils" of Mr. John Wright, a Unitarian minister.[98]

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid.

[95] William Phoebus, An Essay on the Doctrine and Order of the Evangelical Church of America (New York: Abraham Paul, 1817), p. 62.

[96] See Smith, "Introduction," Horace Bushnell, pp. 9f for a brief summary of the Unitarian position.

One very clear source for the Methodist preachers' understanding of the person of Christ was the Scriptures. That the Scriptures do constantly witness to the divinity of Christ was for the Methodists a most conclusive argument for his deity. In the Scriptures the works of God, such as creation (Jn. 1:1; Col. 1:16,17) are ascribed to Jesus.[99] Further, Jesus is represented as assuming the prerogatives of God. For example, Jesus went about forgiving sins (Mk. 3:3-11) without making any reference to any other power or authority but his own.[100] Then too, it was clear from the Scriptures that Jesus assumed the attributes of God. Such incommunicable attributes as eternity, immutability, omnipresence, and omniscience belong only to God and cannot be communicated to his creatures. However, the fact that these attributes, throughout the Scriptures, were ascribed to Jesus[101] attested that Jesus is God.[102] The divine names and titles given to Jesus further evidenced his divinity.[103]

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[97] Durbin, "Character and Mission of Jesus Christ," The Methodist Preacher, pp. 238f.

[98] Emory, The Divinity of Christ, Vindicated from the Cavils and Observations of Mr. John Wright, pp. 10f.

[99] Ibid., p. 7.

[100] Durbin, "Character and Mission of Jesus Christ," The Methodist Preacher, p. 241.

The extent to which the Methodist preachers relied on the Scriptures as a witness to the deity of Christ can be seen in the syllogism used by Durbin:

> The evangelist John says, 'Jesus Christ made all things' Jn. 1:4; but the Apostle Paul says 'He that made all things is God' Heb. 3:4; Therefore, Jesus Christ is God: and let all the world answer, 'Amen'.[104]

A second source for the Christological statements of early American Methodism which frequently has been overlooked was ancient Christian literature. The patristic writings had been an important part of Anglican tradition. John Wesley, who was trained in Anglicanism, confessed a deep indebtedness to the fathers of early Christianity.[105] The language used by the American Methodists was strongly reminiscent of the expressions from the writings of the fathers of patristic Christianity. Laban Clark, in a summary statement, noted that Christ's divinity "is not derived and subordinate; but he is properly God; and essentially one with the Father."[106] William Phoebus echoed the same theme in language which was strikingly similar to the patristic period. God the Father has "by an inconceivable and ineffable way, begotten his Son coequal and coeternal with himself; and therefore [he] is called 'the only begotten of God' (Jn. 3:16)."[107]

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[101] Those attributes which the Methodists judged the Scriptures to ascribe to Jesus are: eternity (Jn. 1:1), immutability (Heb. 1:10-12), omnipresence (Mt. 28:20), and omniscience (Jn. 21:17).

[102] Emory, The Divinity of Christ, Vindicated from the Cavils and Observations of Mr. John Wright, pp. 7ff. See also Durbin, "Character and Mission of Jesus Christ," The Methodist Preacher, p. 242.

[103] Durbin, "Character and Mission of Jesus Christ," The Methodist Preacher, p. 242.

[104] Ibid., p. 245. Emory used the same syllogism in The Divinity of Christ, Vindicated from the Cavils and Observations of Mr. John Wright, p. 10.

[105] Outler, "Introduction," John Wesley, p. 9.

Phoebus considered at some length the meaning of Jesus as the Word of God. His discussion revealed an awareness of the logos Christology as developed through the fathers.[108] In his book, An Essay on the Doctrines and Order of the Evangelical Church of America, Phoebus observed that there were two significant meanings to the use of the term "word." Word, in the first place, may be understood as reason. In this context, word suggests the idea of inferring one thing from another, and thus, may be said to be the offspring of the mind. Word may also stand for speech. As such it is the audible expression of one's own thoughts and reasoning, and therefore the interpretation of the mind.[109] When the term "word" is applied to Christ, it implies, in the first sense, that "he [the Word] was generated by the mind of the Father and that the eternal Word was that perfect notion, and idea, and conception which God from the beginning had formed of himself."[110] The second meaning suggests that Jesus Christ is the perfect image of God even as words are the image of the mind.[111]

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[106] Clark, "The Nature and Design of the Atonement," The Methodist Preacher, p. 287.

[107] Phoebus, An Essay on the Doctrines and Order of the Evangelical Church of America, p. 33.

[108] For a discussion of this theme as reflected in the writings of the patristic fathers, see G.T. Prestige, God in Patristic Thought (London: William Heineman Ltd., 1936), pp. 123ff.

[109] Phoebus, An Essay on the Doctrines and Order of the Evangelical Church of America, p. 47.

In keeping with traditional Christological statements, American Methodism while asserting that the "Word was God" also affirmed that the "Word was made flesh " (Jn. 1:4). As J.P. Durbin stated, Christ, in order "to restore knowledge of the true God,...tabernacle[d] among [his people] in the flesh."[112] As such, Jesus took upon himself the infirmities of human nature.[113]

It is significant to recall that at this point in time, the humanity of Jesus was not being doubted. Liberal Unitarianism and Universalism were calling into question the deity of Christ. In the writings of American Methodism during this period, then, there is in evidence a marked concern to uphold the traditional Chalcedonian formula of Jesus as God and man. Though the Logos was made flesh, he did not cease to be divine. As William Phoebus observed, the Logos was "not so made flesh as to cease to be the Word: not changing [what] he was, but assuming [what] he was not: although our humanity was advanced by him; his divinity was not diminished."[114] The same conviction was repeated by Henry Bascom. "In becoming what he was not, he did not cease to be what he was before."[115] Or again, as Thomas Morris observed, "The divine nature is not absorbed by the human, nor the human changed into the divine," but are permanently united in the person of the Son of God.[116] In short, "this mysterious being contains in His person two whole and perfect natures - the Godhead and manhood; never to be divided; whereof is one Christ, very God and very man."[117]

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[110] Ibid., p. 47.

[111] Ibid., p. 53.

[112] Durbin, "The Character and Mission of Jesus Christ," The Methodist Preacher, p. 253.

[113] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 151.

There was no effort on the part of the Methodist men to discuss in what sense the two natures may be said to be united in Christ. Indeed, such metaphysical theorizing was simply not their concern. The Methodist minister was intent only to uphold the mysterious union of the two natures. His concern here was a very practical one. In language and thought reminiscent of Anselm, it was asserted by the Methodists that he who should redeem the world had to be both divine and human. Morris reasoned that if Jesus Christ were only human, but not divine, then he would not have offered his life as that adequate sacrifice for the sins of man. His obedience unto death would have been only that which was required of him. That is, "if Christ himself were finite, ...he would owe his author all the service he was able to perform, and, therefore would have nothing left with which to buy salvation for man."[118] However, in that he was in reality the divine lawgiver, his death was the all sufficient sacrifice for sin. Yet, he who should redeem fallen man must be human. If Christ was to satisfy the demands of the moral law, then he must meet those demands in the very same nature by which the law was broken. J.P. Durbin explained that redemption could be effected only by having the demands of the law answered by the same creature that sinned.[119] Hence, the Redeemer of mankind, that "peace maker capable of acting as a dayspring between offended Jehovah and rebel man" had to be both divine and human.[120]

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[114] Phoebus, An Essay on the Doctrines and Order of the Evangelical Church of America, p. 57.

[115] Henry Bascom, Sermons from the Pulpit (Louisville: Morton and Griswald, 1850), p. 123.

[116] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 153.

[117] William Simmons, "Christ and His Forerunner," Sermons on Miscellaneous Subjects by the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Senior Preachers of the Ohio and North Ohio Conferences (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1853), p. 261.

> A Man? His arm is too feeble to reach heaven. An angel? His arm is too short to reach earth. Who then? None but the Lord Jesus Christ, the God-man, mediator; he, suspended between the heavens and the earth, with the right hand of his divinity lays hold on the eternal throne, with the left hand of his humanity, grasps a sinking world; and by an

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[118] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 40.

[119] Durbin, "The Character and Mission of Jesus Christ," The Methodist Preacher, p. 253.

[120] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 50.

> exertion of those arms, which are nerved with omnipotence, brings heaven and earth, God and man, together.[121]

It is evident throughout their writings that American Methodists held up before all a lofty view of the person of Christ. The source for their understanding was first of all the Scriptures. The Scriptures stood as the supreme witness to the nature of his being. The Methodist ministers turned to the early fathers to underscore the Christological statements which had been gleaned from the Scriptures. Their language and thought reveal an awareness of the crucial Christological writings of the earlier centuries. The early American Methodists were clearly within the ark of tradition in their understanding of the person of Christ, and made frequent use of tradition to defend against the liberal themes of Unitarianism and Universalism.

While it can be said that Methodism had a strong appreciation for the person of Christ, its greater attention was directed toward his work. To use Pauline terminology, it was a thrilling fact to know that "God was in Christ...", but even more awesome was the truth that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself..." (II Cor. 5:19). One cannot fully appreciate the work of Christ apart from his person. However, on the other side of the ledger, with the Methodists, it was the demands of soteriology which inspired a lofty Christology. Indeed, the work of Christ was the focus of the evangelical message of Methodism.

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[121] Ibid.

> Every truth of Divine revelation is important to be known; but when received collectively and relatively, some of these views appear more immediately important than others. And if there be any one truth more so than another, it is that which relates to the atonement made by Jesus Christ for the sinful world. This to the system of Christianity is what the material sun is to the natural world. It is the grand source and center which gives light, heat, animation to the whole system.[122]

When American Methodists considered the work of Christ, the focus was primarily on his sacrificial death. Only slight attention was given to the life of Christ as an integral part of his work. There were but passing references to the offices or estates of Christ, i.e., prophet, priest, and king. The most important function of Christ was carried out through his priestly office. The emphasis upon the death of Christ completely overshadowed his other works. The day of atonement, this was the day when the work of Christ was accomplished. With some flare, Noah Levings exclaimed:

> O my soul, what a day of interest was that [day of atonement] to the world! We have heard of a day on which a world was involved in the waters of a flood. We have heard of a day on which whole cities were reduced to heaps of smoking ruins.... But what are these in comparison to that day when all heavens, in breathless silence, paused and with an interest commensurate with the importance of the work, beheld the achievement of 'The Shepherd of the Stone of Israel', who amidst the darkness that shrouded the heavens, and the

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[122] "Magee on the Atonement," The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review, XV (1933), 259. This article represents a review of William Magee's Discourses and Dissertations on on the Scriptural Doctrines of the Atonement and Sacrifice by the editors of The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review.

> trembling which shook all nature to her centre, cried with a loud voice, 'It is finished.'[123]

American Methodism shared in part liberal theology's criticism of the classical interpretation of the atonement, which was characteristic of eighteenth century Protestant Orthodoxy. New England Calvinism, as well as the Wesleyan evangelicalism in England, viewed the atonement in the Anselmic sense. The Shorter Catechism, which directed such a New England divine as Jonathan Edwards, stated that Christ, by paying the full debt which sinners owed to God and by appeasing the divine wrath, opened the way for the salvation of the elect.[124] The central theme of the satisfaction theory was likewise crucial for John Wesley. Wesley asserted that Christ was the one who by his death satisfied the divine wrath and provided for our forgiveness through the infinite value of his sacrificial death.[125] The Anselmic theme can be seen in the following quote as Wesley stated the problem which man faced.

> But what shall he give in exchange for his soul, which is forfeited to the just vengeance of God? Wherewithal shall he come before the Lord? How

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[123] Noah Levings, "The Stone with Seven Eyes," The Methodist Preacher (Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853), p. 279.

[124] Smith, "Introduction," Horace Bushnell, p. 18.

[125] Colin Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), p. 83. See also Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, p. 209.

> shall he pay Him that he oweth? Were he from this moment to perform the most perfect obedience to every command of God, this would make no amends for a single sin,....He sees himself utterly helpless with regard to atoning for his past sins; utterly unable to make any amends to God, to pay any ransom for his soul.[126]

On the whole, it must be said that Jonathan Edwards, as well as John Wesley, accepted the penal satisfaction idea of Christ's atoning work. However, in the writings of both men there were present elements which anticipated what was to be known as the "Edwardean" or the "governmental" view of the atonement. In his discussion of the atonement, Edwards often referred to God as the "governor" or "Rector"[127] who must punish those who have offended his divine law.[128] Jonathan Edwards, however, was but the forerunner of a theme which was to receive new impetus with Joseph Bellamy and, in turn, reach full bloom in the thought of Jonathan Edwards Jr.[129] In John Wesley's writings it is also possible to see references which point to the governmental theory of the atonement. In commenting on Romans 3:26, Wesley observed that the death of Christ was in reality a demonstration of God's righteousness to the end that he

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[126] John Wesley, Wesley's Standard Sermons, ed. by E. H. Sudgen, I (London: Epworth Press, 1921), 324. Hereafter referred to as Sermons.

[127] Jonathan Edwards, Works, VII (Worchester ed.; New York: Levitt and Allen, 1856), 512-514.

[128] Ibid., pp. 360-374.

[129] See Haroutunian, Piety Versus Moralism: The Passing of New England Theology, chap. vii for discussion of the development of the Edwardean view.

"might evidence himself to be strictly and inviolably righteous in the administration of His government, even while He is the merciful 'justifier' of the sinner 'that believeth in Jesus.'"[130]

Liberal theology during the first half of the nineteenth century was critical of the Anselmic view as well as the Edwardean or governmental interpretation of the atonement. William E. Channing and Hosea Ballou, the arch spokesmen for Unitarianism and Universalism, respectively, both opposed the Anselmic idea because of its emphasis upon the need to appease the God of wrath, who, after being satisfied by a sacrifice of infinite worth, is then reconciled to man.[131] The Edwardean view of the atonement was held to be offensive to the nature of God in that it represented God as demanding the suffering of an innocent person whose death in turn enhanced the character of God.[132] Channing observed that these more widely accepted views were fundamentally weak because they placed more emphasis upon punishing the offense than upon redeeming the individual.[133] Hence, Channing, as well as Ballou, in lieu of the above themes advanced a moral view of the atonement. In brief, Channing stated that the intent of Christ's mission was to effect "a moral, or spiritual deliverance of mankind."[134] The life of Christ along with his death constituted the supreme example of obedience which was to be followed by all.[135] Ballou agreed with Channing's stress upon the moral influence of Christ's life and death. Herein was the love of the Father so convincingly revealed as to reconcile men to God.[136]

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[130] John Wesley, Explanatory Notes on the New Testament (London: Epworth Press, 1948), p. 531.

[131] Channing, "Unitarian Christianity: A Sermon Delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Fared Sparks, to the Pastoral Care of the First Independent Church in Baltimore, May 7, 1819," The Works of William E. Channing, D.D., p. 378.; Ballou, Treatise on the Atonement, p. 112.

[132] Ibid.

[133] Channing, "Unitarian Christianity: A Sermon Delivered at the Ordination of the Rev. Fared Sparks, to the Pastoral Care of the First Independent Church in Baltimore, May 7, 1819," The Works of William E. Channing, D.D., p. 379.

American Methodism shared with liberal theology of this period the desire to avoid the idea that the death of Christ was in some sense a payment demanded by the wrath of God. However, Methodism was equally convinced that the liberal views were inadequate.

Laban Clark, in his sermon on "The Nature and Design of the Atonement," apparently had in mind the liberal emphasis upon the exemplary character of Christ's life and death. Herein Clark did not purpose to deny that Christ's life was to be man's example, but to affirm that his life and death went far beyond a mere example. While the life of Christ should be placed before all as an example of proper living, yet, as Clark observed, such a life as lived by Christ was beyond the abilities of finite man. Clark reasoned that if Christ should be represented merely as our perfect example,

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[134] Ibid., p. 378.

[135] Ibid., p. 316.

[136] Ballou, Treatise on the Atonement, pp. 117ff.

"the brilliance of those colors [from the beauty of his life] would only cast a dark gloom over the sinfulness and wretchedness of our moral conditions."[137] For Clark, as for the whole of American Methodism, the work of Christ properly understood centered on his sacrificial death. There could be no recovery of fallen man apart from the vicarious death of Christ. Indeed, as Clark explained, "I cannot conceive of any other way by which God can forgive sins consistently without weakening our obligation or encouraging our vice."[138] Clark saw other positions as being strapped with too many insoluble problems. In response to the assertion that God could have forgiven sin apart from the death of Christ, Clark answered that this emphasis left one with the necessity of determining whether forgiveness was universal or limited. Neither alternative was acceptable. To insist that forgiveness was universal was to negate the effectiveness of the law. On the other hand, to assert that forgiveness was restricted to the elect only was to attribute partiality to the forgiving Father. In either case, Clark observed, "the majesty and perfections of divine law and of the divine government would be essentially weakened."[139] Clark considered other related objections raised by liberal theology. In respect to the argument that it reflected upon the goodness of God to suppose that he would not forgive sin without a ransom price paid to satisfy the demands of the violated law, Clark noted that the death of Christ did not represent any appeasement of private injuries, but the administration of a public law. As for God punishing an innocent being, Clark reminded the objectors that the death of Christ was in reality God taking upon himself the punishment necessitated by sin.[140] Clark here repeated the Pauline theme that "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself...." (II Cor. 5:19).

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[137] Clark, "The Nature and Design of the Atonement," _The Methodist Preacher_, p. 290.

[138] _Ibid_., p. 287.

[139] _Ibid_., p. 288.

Laban Clark's sermon has been noted at some length because it is rather indicative of the course which Methodism was to follow in this period. Once again there is in evidence a concern to avoid what was judged to be, on the one hand, the pitfalls which had characterized the traditionally accepted penal view of the atonement, and yet, at the same time, to maintain the basics of the evangelical Christianity. What was basic was that the death of Christ was a sacrificial death for the sins of mankind. It was "an offering for sin."[141] With Clark's sermon serving as an introduction to Methodism's view of the atonement, it is now fitting to examine in greater detail the understanding of Christ's work as reflected in the writings of American Methodists.

If the death of Christ was an offering for sin, the natural question which arises is to whom or to what was the offering paid. At no point in the writings of American Methodism was it suggested that the death of Christ represented a ransom paid to the devil. If not to the devil, then it would seem that Christ's death was a payment to God. However, this fails to express properly Methodism's idea of the atonement. American Methodism agreed with liberal theology that the idea of a ransom paid to God to appease his wrath was offensive to the very nature of God. Benjamin Lambord stated that the death of Christ was "not the gratification of any angry passions or furious resentments...."[142] The idea that God must be propitiated was denounced by the Methodists as being in direct contradiction to the scriptural emphasis that the death of Christ was a manifestation of God's love. In short, the atonement was viewed as "a wonderful display or unfolding, a proof and demonstration of the love of God to man."[143]

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[140] Ibid.

[141] Ibid., p. 287.

> How shocking to all the benevolent feelings of our nature, as well as revolting to that feeling of veneration and filial love which the spirit of piety inspires, to contemplate the Deity as moved to devise and execute the grand and sublime scheme of redemption from the feeling of fiery indignation and as letting this indignation spend itself on the heart of His innocent Son![144]

Asa Shinn repeated a similar indictment.

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[142] Benjamin Lambord, "The Soul Transformed by a Believing View of God," The Methodist Preacher (Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853), p. 92.

[143] "Magee on the Atonement," The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review, XV (1933), 273.

[144] Ibid., 274.

> Shame on the man that shall represent redemption as having its seat in the satisfaction and gratification of unrelenting vengeance, while all heaven is astonished by the bleeding mercy it displays! Prophets, apostles, and angels together are shouting and proclaiming the great love wherewith our heavenly Father hath loved us; must we consider him as a tyrannical and malicious being whose fury must be appeased by an infliction of the whole penalty upon his dear Son, before he will agree for the sinner to escape.[145]

Such a view of satisfaction as Shinn observed suggested "that God was waiting around for his goodness to be bought by a price that exactly equalled its value."[146] This ruled out any idea that the death of Christ was an act of grace. It was as though God "resolved not to exercise any grace or favor at all, but merely to buy and sell, according to a literal bargain...."[147] The idea that the death of Christ was a payment made to God not only was counter to a gracious God, but at the same time tended to make God and Jesus into two Gods in conflict with each other. God was the creditor and Jesus the debtor. By the death of Jesus Christ, which canceled the debt, the two became reconciled.[148]

It was suggested by the Methodists that much of the confusion and difficulty in which talk about the atonement was enshrined could be attributed to the tendency to accept the language used to express concepts of the atonement as literal expressions of fact. Atonement language points to metaphysical realities rather than literal fact.[149] When interpreted in a literal sense, the idea, it was said, bordered on absurdity.

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[145] Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 156.

[146] Ibid., p. 157.

[147] Ibid.; see also "Magee on the Atonement," The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review, XV (1933), 281.

[148] Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 159.

> Has God the father actually _sold_ the human family to His Son for a stipulated price? And has the Son actually _paid_ the price demanded, and thus _literally purchased_ mankind, so as to remunerate Himself for what He did and suffered?[150]

Having insisted that the language used to describe the atonement must be understood in metaphysical terms, American Methodism proceeded to describe the atonement in terms of sacrifice and satisfaction. However, this was not satisfaction in the sense of personal appeasement. In what sense, then, did the Methodist writers consider satisfaction? That is, was the death of Christ necessary to meet the internal principles of the divine being, or to fulfill the demands of a moral government? It seems characteristic of the writings of the American Methodists that it was not a matter of "either/or" but rather of "both/and." One cannot separate the Divine Governor from his moral government.

Within the Methodist writings there were references which pointed to a type of satisfaction view of the atonement. Atonement was necessary to meet the internal principles of the divine nature. The Methodists viewed sin in the traditional terms as an offense against the divine law.

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[149] _Ibid._, pp. 263f. See also Merritt, "A Discourse on Future Punishment," _The Methodist Magazine_, VI (1823), 242.

[150] "Magee on the Atonement," _The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review_, XV (1933), 282.

The summary definition given by Thomas Morris is representative. "To say all in a few words, sin is rebellion against God; a sinner is a transgressor of his law, or a rebel against him, according to the law which he is under [whether that law be] conscience or revelation."[151] Fallen man stands before God as one guilty of a grave offense and therefore must await the sentence of death, which is the punishment due him for his disobedience. However, Christ takes man's place and in offering himself unto death, "receives the blow intended for the criminal, obeys the law in all its minutiae and extent,...[thereby] making it possible for the guilty and condemned wretch to be released...[and] at the same time guarding every infringment upon the justice of the lawgiver...."[152] In this situation, that which seems to be at stake is not the structure of the moral government, but the internal principles of the divine character. It was argued that for God to rescind the demands of the law without receiving satisfaction for the offense would mean violence to his own perfections. "It would be pouring the utmost contempt upon the wisdom of God," Benjamin Lambord reasoned, "to suppose that he requires obedience to his commands, and yet takes no interest in supporting their authority against the insults of his subjects."[153] Further,

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[151] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 205.

[152] John Maffit, "The Faithful Saying," The Methodist Preacher (Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853), pp. 82f.

[153] Lambord, "The Soul Transformed by a Believing View of God," The Methodist Preacher, p. 92.

"the justice of God demands satisfaction for the violated law. The holiness of God renders it necessary."[154] In the death of Christ, that which was required by the very nature of God was fulfilled. Hence, his death is said to be a sacrifice, or an offering of satisfaction paid for the sin of man.

The situation which the Methodist preachers have presented here is not that of an avenging God taking out his wrath upon his innocent Son, but it is more a matter of the death of Christ fulfilling the requirements of the divine nature. It must be remembered as observed above, that God has entered into this act of recovery, having taken upon himself the curse of man's disobedience in the person of his Son. With this thought consciously in mind, Methodism sought to avoid that dualism to which the Anselmic idea of the atonement so fatefully lends itself.[155]

Along side those references which suggest a satisfaction type theory of the atonement, there were others which pointed to a governmental view. Sin was described as bringing disorder to God's orderly universe.[156] Clearly, sin was not simply a private matter but also a disruptive force within society.[157] God, who possesses an infinite love for order, was greatly displeased by this disjunction which sin brought into his moral society.[158] Such an atrocity as man's disobedience to the law of the divine society could not be overlooked. As Henry Bascom explained, "The principles of his government required...that sin should not go unpunished in the kingdom and government of Jehovah."[159] The atoning sacrifice, Tobias Spicer noted, was "not necessary because God is vindictive, or because he is reluctant to forgive sin, but because his authority must be preserved in his moral universe."[160] Any other position, according to Asa Shinn, contradicted the judgment of common sense. Shinn argued that punishment administered by a temporal ruler, which might not be for the support of sound government and the security of the general welfare, could only arise from "his caprice or ignorance, from his pride and selfishness, or from the tyranny and malevolence of his disposition."[161] Such an act of punishment would not be tolerated. Likewise, just as punishment within a temporal context was for the good of the society, so the death of Christ was for the vindication of the divine government.[162] American

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[154] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

[155] See J.K. Mozley, *The Doctrine of the Atonement* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916), p. 130.

[156] Lambord, "The Soul Transformed by a Believing View of God," *The Methodist Preacher*, p. 92.

[157] Merritt, "An Essay on Atonement," *The Methodist Magazine*, VII (1824), 204.

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[158] Lambord, "The Soul Transformed by a Believing View of God," _The Methodist Preacher_, p. 92.

[159] Bascom, _Sermons from the Pulpit_, p. 90.

[160] Spicer, _The Way from Sin to Sanctification_, p. 25.

[161] Shinn, _Essay on the Plan of Salvation_, p. 153.

[162] _Ibid_.

Methodism as a whole shared this conviction. Typical expressions which appeared throughout the writings of Methodism were that God acted "not as a private being, but as a moral governor..."[163] in order "to maintain the purity and authority of his moral government...."[164] The above statements and phrases clearly state that the death of Christ was for the preservation of the dignity of the moral government.

The writings of early American Methodism seemingly embraced in juxtaposition two views of the atonement, a modified satisfaction view and the governmental theory. At first, one is tempted to say that the Methodists did hold two distinct interpretations of the atonement, but that they should not be too severely criticized in that theologizing about the nature of the atonement was not their primary concern. However, it is quite clear that throughout this period there was a conscious attempt within Methodism to interweave the two ideas. Nothing could be further from their thinking than the separation of the principles of moral government from the Divine Governor. The principles of the moral universe are what they are precisely because God is who he is. God, for the Methodists, was God in relation to his moral society. Timothy Merritt explained, "The character of God is so connected with his government that if [the government] suffers, [he] suffers with it."[165] For this reason, as Laban Clark observed, God "was bound by his own perfections to maintain the purity and authority of his moral government."[166] The summary view of the atonement offered by the editors of The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review is not only representative of the Methodist position but also reflects this conscious effort to unite the two themes.

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[163] Merritt, "An Essay on Atonement," The Methodist Magazine, VII (1824), 205.

[164] Clark, "The Nature and Design of the Atonement," The Methodist Preacher, p. 288.

[165] Merritt, "A Discourse on Future Punishment," The Methodist Magazine, VI (1823), 245.

> ...the offering of Jesus Christ is all that either his justice or goodness required, or all that a God of infinite wisdom, power, and love demanded to vindicate the honor of his own government, and to make it every way consistent with His perfections, and with the greatest good of His moral kingdom,....[167]

The above emphasis represents one more example of the effort made by early American Methodism to formulate a position which took into account some of the drawbacks of traditional orthodoxy and at the same time remained loyal to the basic themes of the evangelical message. Seeking to avoid the problems implicit in the classical satisfaction view, and yet desiring to uphold the sacrificial character of the death of Christ, American Methodism, as did the Edwardean group at the close of the eighteenth century, opted to talk about the atonement in the context of a moral society. The moral government represents but an outward expression of the divine character as it exists in God.

By shifting the focus from the propitiation of God's wrath to the vindication of the moral government, American

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[166] Clark, "The Nature and Design of the Atonement," The Methodist Preacher, p. 288.

[167] "Magee on the Atonement," The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review, XV (1933), 281.

Methodism felt that it had freed itself to speak in more meaningful terms about the death of Christ as a revelation of God's love. The death of Christ, while revealing God's abhorrence of sin, was at the same time a clear manifestation of God's love for the sinner.[168] Asa Shinn noted that God by right could have demanded the death of every individual who turned from him, but his love would not allow such.

> Rather than his apostate creatures should die the dreadful death, the loving God himself comes down from heaven! He hangs between the heavens and the earth, a spectacle to angels and to men! What heart of stone - what frozen, savage heart - can remain unmoved and unconcerned at such melting love as his.[169]

Stephen Olin, in another way echoed Shinn's sentiment. This compelling act of love should be the central focus of all preaching. "When we can induce a man to fix his eyes on the cross," Olin affirmed, "our work is done."[170]

There remains yet a need to mention one other salient feature of American Methodism's understanding of the atonement. "Without regard to age, sex, etc.," Thomas Morris exclaimed, "we are authorized to proclaim a full, free, and present salvation to all who will accept it on easy and equitable terms of the Gospel."[171] In this one statement Morris summarized Methodism's unique emphasis upon general redemption and conditional salvation. "The atonement," explained Timothy Merritt, "has been made, and in itself is complete; but its application is conditional."[172]

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[168] Olin, Works, I, 11.

[169] Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 156.

[170] Olin, Works, I, 12.

[171] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 31.

The intent of Methodism's particular position is apparent. On the one hand, Methodism sought to escape the problems implicit in traditional Calvinism's view of limited atonement. It was their firm conviction that the merits of Christ's death extend to all mankind and not simply to the elect. Anything less than this was but a mockery to the God of love. James Floy, commenting on the idea of limited atonement, hypothesized that it would have been a terrible day had such a view been the choice of God. He sermonized:

> O what a diminution of its glory, if the doctrine had ever reached heaven and were believed there, that the sufferings of Christ were designed for but a portion of the race, and that its blessing was limited to a few! Or worse still, if upon angelic ears had fallen the modification of the doctrine, which could not have failed to impress on angelic hearts a doubt of God's sincerety; - Offered to all, but intended for a few.[173]

The Methodist preacher was deeply committed to the theme of general redemption and spoke frequently of it with apparent relish. The remarks of E.F. Newell, who ministered in the New England states, are typical:

> Pleasant and profitable were the seasons that I enjoyed in visiting from house to house and recommending pure, experimental religion to all.

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[172] Merritt, "An Essay on Atonement," The Methodist Magazine, VII (1824), 202.

[173] James Floy, "Salvation - Mysterious and Glorious," The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit, collected and revised by Davis W. Clark, ed. by George Peck (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1848), p. 81.

> This was a new doctrine to them; for election and reprobation had been taught there most rigidly. But great joy filled my heart whilst I opened the Bible and showed them that whosoever calls upon the name of God in humble prayer shall be saved; for the same God over all, is rich in mercy unto all that call upon him - all are invited to look and live, and whosoever will may take of the waters of life freely.[174]

In Juxtaposition to the theme of general redemption, American Methodism stressed with equal fervor the concept of conditional salvation. This was a prevalent thread running through the evangelical message of the Wesleyan tradition. The onslaught in America of the liberal emphasis upon universal salvation only served to deepen Methodism's commitment to the concept of conditional salvation. The idea of universal salvation, as Timothy Merritt explained, made the gospel nihil.

> ...the doctrine represents sin as a small evil, and God as being not at all displeased at it. It teaches that sin does not deserve eternal punishment, and of course, eternal life is not the gift of God through Jesus Christ. For we do not need Christ to restore what we never lost, or to procure that for us that which we can obtain without him.[175]

The Methodist position is succinctly summarized by Fisk. He observed, "...notwithstanding the atonement without repentance and faith, and consequent pardon and holiness, there can be no final salvation."[176]

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[174] E.F. Newell, Life and Observations of Rev. E.F. Newell, Who Has Been More Than Forty Years an Itinerant Minister in the Methodist Episcopal Church: New England Conference, comp. by C.W. Ainsworth (Worcester: C.W. Ainsworth, 1847), pp. 55f. Hereafter referred to as Life and Observations.

[175] Merritt, "A Discourse on Future Punishment," The Methodist Magazine, VI (1823), 209.

The themes discussed in this chapter cannot be fully appreciated if viewed only as reiterations by American Methodists of their Wesleyan heritage. To be sure, these themes bespeak a deep indebtedness of American Methodism to its tradition. At the same time, the way in which these basic ideas were developed reveals a growing awareness among a significant number of American Methodists of the theological community in America. Throughout this chapter attention has been directed toward American Methodism's effort to assume a theological stance which avoided what it judged to be the weaknesses of traditional Calvinism on the one hand and liberal theology on the other, and at the same time, remain true to the basic themes of the evangelical message as received from its Wesleyan tradition. Having considered some basic themes which were foundational to the evangelical message of early American Methodism, it is now fitting to give more specific attention to its message.

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[176] See Merritt, A Discourse on Universal Salvation [also] Two Discourses on the Same Subject by Wilbur Fisk, p. 197.

III. THE MESSAGE OF EARLY AMERICAN METHODISM

Early American Methodism, responding to the theological context of its day, felt compelled to defend its understanding of the basic themes of evangelical Christianity in the arena of theological debate. However, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, Methodism's primary concern was to present these basic themes in understandable language to the man in the pew. The Methodist minister was first and foremost a preacher, an evangel of the good news. If necessary, he became a polemicist. However, he made an honest effort not to confuse polemics with proclamation. Abel Stevens judged that George Pickering practiced the ideal in preaching: "Bombast and metaphysical elaborateness in the pulpit, he violently but profoundly condemned, as indicating a lack of good sense and disinterested purpose in the preacher."[1] Stephen Olin also stressed that the pulpit was not the place for involved theological disputations. "Nice deductions, conclusions arrived at by ingenious concatenated trains of argument, may do in the forum or in the show of dialectics,"

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[1] Abel Stevens, Memorials of the Introduction of Methodism into the Eastern States: Comprising Biographical Notices of its Early Preachers, Sketches of its First Churches, and Reminiscences of its Early Struggles and Successes (1st series; Boston: Charles H. Pierce, 1848), p. 203. Hereafter referred to as Memorials of the Introduction of Methodism into the Eastern States.

Olin observed, "but bring no comfort to the soul that has roused itself to the inquiry, 'Am I God's friend or foe?'"[2] Olin depicted the concerned individual's response to well-reasoned arguments as follows:

> Don't mock me. Don't give me a stone. Don't lead me to empty cisterns! I hunger, I thrist. Don't attempt to satisfy the wants of my spiritual nature with forms and tradition - 'with husks which the swine do eat'....Give me the bread of life. Lift up the full cup of living water to my parched lips, that I may thirst no more.[3]

Such men as George Pickering and Stephen Olin represent well Methodism's commitment to the plain truths of Christian faith. The faithful preaching of such truths was viewed "as the honored means of God's special appointment, designed for the dispensing of light and heat" in the world, to the end that men might come into an experienced relationship with God through Christ Jesus.[4] The intent of this present chapter is to examine the evangelical message of early American Methodism. Particular attention will be given to Methodism's ordo salutis, which included three major phases: conviction, conversion, and sanctification. However, before discussing the order of salvation as developed in the preaching of American Methodism, a number of related themes will be considered.

Early American Methodism stood well within the ark of the classical Western understanding of redemption or reconciliation. The characteristic approach to the understanding of redemption has taken into account both its objective and subjective aspects. The objective nature of redemption focuses on what God has done for man in Jesus Christ independent of man's response. To use the Pauline phrase, objectively speaking, the focus is on the affirmation that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" (II Cor. 5:19). The subjective aspect of redemption centers on the existential appropriation of the act of reconciliation to the individual. "Be reconciled to God" (II Cor. 5:20). American Methodism as previously stated, was committed to this dual emphasis. Redemption, in the objective sense, represented for Methodism an act initiated and brought into reality by God in Christ Jesus. However, there was the element of contingency or condition in that, subjectively speaking, redemption rested upon the response of the individual.

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[2] Olin, Works, I, 13.

[3] Ibid., p. 263.

[4] Christian Advocate and Journal, I (1826), 49.

American Methodism stressed with equal commitment that salvation was by grace and, at the same time, was conditional. One emphasis did not negate the other. Against the argument that conditional salvation was counter to the idea of salvation by grace, the Methodists replied that the fact of reconciliation accomplished through Jesus Christ was an act of pure grace. In short, Wilbur Fisk commented, "It was pure grace, unmerited love that moved God to provide salvation for our world."[5] Further, in respect to the specific accusation that conditional regeneration undercut the idea of salvation by grace, it was asserted that the ability to fulfill the conditions of salvation rested upon the gracious ability which all mankind enjoyed by virtue of the merit of Christ's atoning work. As noted in the previous chapter, Methodism took the position that grace enabled the individual to function as a free moral agent in the most complete sense of the word. Apart from grace, the natural man is not capable of making a correct moral choice. "A fallen man," Fisk explained, "without grace, could no more choose to submit to God than a fallen angel."[6] Even in respect to man's act of repentance and faith, it was asserted that while in one sense these were acts of the individual, at the same time they were brought about through the agency of the Holy Spirit and therefore must be understood as acts inspired by grace.

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[5] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 39.

At this point American Methodism was simply continuing a theme which was characteristic of its Wesleyan tradition. John Wesley, in a rather extensive summary statement, clearly spelled out his understanding of salvation by grace.

> Salvation begins with what is usually termed (and very properly) preventing grace; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency towards life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God. Salvation is carried on by

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[6] *Ibid*.

> convincing grace, usually in Scripture termed repentance; which brings a larger measure of self knowledge, and a further deliverance from the heart of stone. Afterwards we experience the proper Christian salvation; whereby, 'through grace,' we are 'saved by faith'; consisting of two grand branches, justification and sanctification. By justification we are saved from the guilt of sin, ...by sanctification we are saved from the power and root of sin,....[7]

A correlative to the concept of salvation by grace was the conviction that salvation was effected in the individual through the agency of the Holy Spirit. In his sermon, "The Agency of the Spirit in the Promotion of Christianity," Edmund Janes underscored what he felt to be one of the cardinal truths of the Christian religion. Herein he stated that "the work of the Lord - the enterprises of Christianity, are not carried forward by means and measures that ostensibly and of themselves promise success, but by the invisible, yet almighty Spirit of God."[8] At a later point in his sermon, Janes identified this work as "none other than the glory of God in the salvation of men."[9] Stephen Olin shared this conviction. The Holy Spirit, he observed, "is the divine agent by whose intervention all the benefits of the atonement once made on the cross are brought into contact with the soul of man, to transform his nature, and to produce in him the graces of religion."[10] Nathan Bangs, in a sermon entitled "The Spirit's Influence," emphasized the same theme in a more dramatic fashion.

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[7] Wesley, Works, VI, 509.

[8] Edmund Janes, "The Agency of the Spirit in the Promotion of Christianity," Sermons on Miscellaneous Subjects by the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Senior Preachers of the Ohio and North Ohio Conferences (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1853), p. 93.

[9] Ibid., p. 96.

> Away, then, with idle notions about having a religion destitude of the Spirit of God! No! It is the Divine Agent which awakens the sinner, converts and sanctifies him, which guides, sustains, and comforts the believer through the whole course of his pilgrimage.[11]

In a later context more specific attention will be given to the nature of the work accomplished by the Holy Spirit in effecting man's salvation. Here it is sufficient to note that for American Methodists, the Holy Spirit was held to be the efficient agent of salvation. He was, in effect, the "grace of God that brings salvation."[12]

If, as Methodism asserted, salvation is effected in the individual through the agency of the Holy Spirit, the question then arises as to whether or not man is passive in the appropriation of his salvation. Clearly, for American Methodism, the answer was no. A constant theme of Methodist preaching was that man's salvation was dependent upon the ministry of the Holy Spirit. However, such a ministry, it was said, does not in any respect override the unique character of man as a free moral agent. The agency of the Holy Spirit, Stephen Olin explained, "must, in God's economy, help, but not control, draw, but not force the free will."[13]

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[10] Olin, Works, I, 306.

[11] Nathan Bangs, "The Spirit's Influence," The Methodist Preacher (Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853), p. 42.

[12] Clark, "The Nature and Design of the Atonement," The Methodist Preacher, p. 291.

Frederick Merrick considered at some length this same theme in his sermon, "Consecration to God." In this sermon Merrick emphasized that in respect to his salvation, man must cooperate with God. Merrick noted that there were certain duties each individual had to perform, and that there were certain conditions to be met. In himself, the individual is not capable of such response. Rather, it is only as the Spirit of God works in man that he is able to will and to do that which is needful for his salvation. The Spirit of God, however, "does not irresistibly force him to act, nor does it act for him."[14] The point which Merrick intended to stress was that the work of the Spirit "simply enables the individual to do what is required."[15] In response to the argument that such an emphasis as the above led inevitably to the position of salvation by works, Merrick claimed that even after man has done all that he can do, he remains an "unprofitable servant."[16] Salvation, then, comes to each individual through the cooperation of the divine and human agents. Nathan Bangs's statement seems to be representative of the whole of American Methodism.

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[13] Olin, Works, I, 306.

[14] Frederick Merrick, "Consecration to God," The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit, collected and revised by Davis W. Clark, ed. by George Peck (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1848), p. 121.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Ibid.

> God draws; man runs after him: God works upon his heart; and man co-operates with his God. He leads; man follows: He persuades, not compels; man yields to the persuasion: He gives; man receives: He promises; man believes: He threatens; man avoids: He sheds abroad his love in the heart; man loves him in return: and thankfully adoring the benevolent hand from which he receives so many unremitted favours, he runs the way of God's commands with obedient delight.[17]

Tobias Spicer in more succinct terms summarized the Methodist position. "It is by God's grace that salvation is provided, and it is by an exercise of man's free will that this salvation is obtained."[18]

This dual emphasis upon salvation by grace, yet conditional, was the theme of the Wesleyan tradition warmly embraced by American Methodism. Methodism was deeply committed to the theme of divine initiative and human response. Clearly, the first step had been taken by God. The purpose and plan of salvation had originated in the divine will. Salvation had been accomplished through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is effected in the heart and life of the individual through the agency of the Holy Spirit.[19] The Holy Spirit seeks out man prior to any response on the part of man. That this was a basic conviction of the American Methodists can be substantiated through the numerous references in their autobiographies which witnessed to their being confronted by the Spirit of God. E.F. Newell in his autobiography recalled that at the very early age of five, he witnessed the parting of the sky "by a brightness greater than the sky" and thought that it must have been God. He described his impression as feeling as though he was "standing on a narrow plank and all around was God."[20] Nathan Bangs described one of his first periods of "religious thoughtfulness." At one point in his young life sickness forced Bangs to rest for a period at his father's home. During this time, he wrote later, his mind "was smitten with anguish."[21]

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[17] Bangs, The Reformer Reformed, pp. 47,48.

[18] Spicer, "Grace and Works United," The Methodist Preacher, p. 169.

[19] See Samuel Doughty, "Instability in Religion: A Sermon," The Methodist Magazine, X (1827), 96.

American Methodism preached with equal conviction that man, in that he is a free man, may, and frequently does, reject God's initial dealings with him. Stephen Olin explained that man "possesses the perilous ability to follow the Spirit's drawings with humble and sincere obedience, or to repel them with stubborn opposition."[22] So intent was early American Methodism to uphold the free agency of man that it emphasized in strong language at times that the work of salvation may be completely thwarted by an obstinate will. In a burst of oratory characteristic of Methodist preaching, Tobias Spicer emphasized this basic position.

> In vain does Christ come to seek and save the lost, and wandering sons of men, in vain does the Holy Spirit strive with them, in vain is the gospel preached...if the sinner will not attend to these calls, and come to Christ, if they do not

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[20] Newell, Life and Observations, p. 8.

[21] Stevens, Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D., p. 29.

[22] Olin, Works, I, 75.

improve the day and the means of grace.[23]

The human responsiveness for which American Methodism contended is not to be understood simply in mere negative terms as man's possessing the power to reject the offer of grace. Human responsiveness was also conceived in a positive sense as the power which exercises itself in reaching out to seize the gift of grace. The ability to respond to God's gracious offer can be understood properly only within the framework of Methodism's emphasis upon prevenient grace. As discussed in the previous chapter, prevenient grace or gracious ability qualifies the individual to function as a free moral agent in the truest sense of the word. This grace, present in all, was not understood to be saving grace, but a gracious ability enabling man by his own act to accept saving grace. Wilbur Fisk's explanation was characteristic.

> ...grace has appeared to all men, and that this grace so enlightens, strengthens, and aids the human mind, that it is thereby enabled to make that choice which is the turning point, conditionally, of the soul's salvation; and that it is by the same gracious aid that the man, when he has the good will, is enabled to work out his own salvation unto the end.[24]

By virtue of this grace, man was said to be gracious and free, i.e., "graciously free to choose the salvation of his soul and live, or reject [it] and perish."[25]

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[23] Spicer, "Grace and Works United," The Methodist Preacher, p. 172.

[24] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 182.

[25] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 69.

Prevenient grace is not something for which men must wait around. It is present to and in all men even without their asking for it. This emphasis, characteristic of both Wesleyan and American Methodism, has prompted Umphrey Lee to observe that "for Wesley the natural man is a logical abstraction. Like the economic man or caricatures set up today by amateur psychologists, anthropologists, and theologians, the natural man does not exist."[26] Perhaps Lee has stretched the point somewhat, but the statement does serve to underline the basic conviction of Methodism that every man is endowed with prevenient grace and as such acts as a free moral agent. Apart from this gracious ability, he does not function as a free agent in the complete sense of the word, i.e., with the power to choose for right or for wrong.[27]

It is commonly said that early American Methodism's view of salvation was synergistic, whereas traditional Calvinism's emphasis was monergistic. This position seems to be a correct appraisal, but is in need of some qualification. Methodism, whether in England or in America, sought to avoid a semi-Pelagian understanding of salvation. The semi-Pelagian view spoke in terms of the downward movement of God's grace being met by the upward movement of man's response. Apart from the aid of divine grace, man, by his own natural ability, was capable of such a response. Divine grace in turn so strengthened the natural man as to enable him to reach the moral level necessary for his salvation.[28] The point to be emphasized here is that for American Methodists there would be no upward movement on the part of man if it were not for prevenient grace. This gracious ability, which every individual enjoyed by virtue of the death of Christ, enabled man to respond to the offer of grace. In so doing man was cooperating with God in the appropriation of his salvation.

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[26] Umphrey Lee, John Wesley and Modern Religion (Nashville: Cokesbury Press, 1936), p. 124.

[27] See Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, p. 108.

It is, then, fitting to describe American Methodism's understanding of salvation in terms of divine initiative and human response. At the same time, if understood properly, the concept of human initiative and divine response is not offensive to the Methodist position. In the latter context God's initiative in the bestowal of prevenient grace upon all mankind is simply presupposed. Because of preventing grace, Methodism could announce in all confidence, "Whosoever will may come."

The prime condition of salvation according to the early American Methodists was the act of faith wherein man accepted the offer of grace. To this end one must reach out with arms of true repentance. Hence, repentance was described as a secondary condition. However, in respect to chronological order, Methodism held that repentance preceded faith. While granting that a certain measure of faith must be present prior to any act of repentance, the latter in effect paves the way for the response of saving faith.[29] The man who comes to Christ walks one road. This way leads first of all to repentance and then to positive belief in Christ.

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[28] See Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today, p. 172.

American Methodism did not go to any great lengths to define repentance. It was commonly described as a "godly sorrow for sin." "Now repentance," William McKendree stated, "implies much more than a sense of guilt, accompanied with some feeble acknowledgments, and ineffectual resolutions to reform. It is a godly sorrow for sin...."[30] Clearly, repentance presupposes conviction, which is that state in which one is "convinced of his lost and hopeless condition" through the agency of the Holy Spirit.[31] In short, the act of repentance for Methodism was but the act of articulating the inward experience of conviction. Conviction leads to expressions of one's abhorrence of sin and indeed, of one's own self on account of his sinful nature. This act of deprecation is accompanied by expressions of contrition for having offended God and a renunciation for the former ways of sin.[32] This seemingly morbid act of repentance was presented as that avenue which brings one to the point of positive belief in Christ Jesus. Hence, the American Methodists warned their listeners against trying to escape repentance. Peter Sandford expressed in simple terms the Methodist position that the "faith by which we are justified and renovated [is] based upon evangelical repentance."[33] Thomas Morris, in his sermon on "Repentance and Conversion" was quite explicit in his admonishing the people to repent.

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[29] Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 393.; also, Olin, Works, I, 377. The sense in which American Methodism understood a degree of faith being present prior to the act of repentance will be noted shortly.

[30] William McKendree, The Substance of a Sermon (New York: 1817), p. 12.; see also Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 383 and Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 60.

[31] Sandford, "Salvation by Faith," The Methodist Preacher, p. 193.

> Wherefore we recommend it as a good plan to go into the closet, chamber, or other suitable place in secret and on our knees,...call to our minds the most aggrevating circumstances of our lives, confess them to God one at a time; and then, confess in the aggregate, our public faults and secret crimes, follies of our youth, and the sins of our riper years; and while we confess, let us expect, through Christ, a present, free and full salvation from them all.[34]

In that repentance was held to be a condition of salvation, though, to be sure, a secondary one, the question which must be raised is whether or not American Methodism went beyond the more traditional theme of salvation by grace through faith to adopt a concept of salvation through faith and works. In labeling repentance as a condition of salvation to be met by the individual, it would seem that Methodism in America was ascribing to repentance the nature of a work necessary for salvation. American Methodism viewed repentance as an act wherein the individual renounced his past and turned his back on it. On the surface, then, it would seem that repentance may be said to be a work of the individual. However, as previously noted, if repentance is but the articulation of the inward experience of conviction as effected by the agency of the Holy Spirit, then it represents a sign of man's deep desire for forgiveness.[35] Repentance, then, is not a work in the sense that it demonstrates the righteousness or worthiness of one's own nature, for it is but the outward expression of a deeply felt condition in the inward life of the individual. This inward experience of conviction is accomplished by the work of the Spirit. Hence, it seems proper to say that American Methodism did not repudiate the traditional emphasis of salvation by grace through faith.

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[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 60.

One other aspect of American Methodism's understanding of repentance must be noted. In contrast to traditional Calvinism, Methodism in America, as in England, stressed that repentance is prior to the act of faith. The immediate question posed by this chronological order is how can one experience such contrition apart from some belief or faith in the object against which he has sinned. That is, must not there be some degree of faith prior to repentance? The answer which Methodism gave was yes. However, this was not saving faith. At this point American Methodism echoed the position taken by John Wesley. In his Journal Wesley made a distinction between the "faith of a servant" and the "faith of a son," stating that prior to his Aldersgate experience of 1738, he had only the former, but not the latter.[36] Herein, Wesley outlined two phases in justifying faith. Colin Williams summarized these as follows:

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[35] See Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, p. 111.

> (1) Preliminary faith, which includes the free response to God's prevenient grace and a desire to please him, but [this] is still only the 'faith of a servant.' (2) Justifying faith proper, which is a sure trust and confidence in Christ bringing a conviction of forgiveness, this being 'the faith of a son.'[37]

American Methodists apparently were aware of just such a distinction for they commonly spoke of a portion of faith present to the person prior to his act of repentance. In one sense, Asa Shinn observed, faith "is the root and ground of repentance" in that before repentance "there has to be an act of the mind that embraces the truth which in turn produces repentance."[38] The point implicit in Shinn's statement is that a man cannot be truly repentant apart from some grasp and indeed some credence for the truth which judges him. Such an awareness, however, is "graciously" present to all mankind by virtue of prevenient grace. The conclusion which William Cannon made regarding Wesley's position is equally applicable to American Methodism: "that the common grace of God given unto all men alike is sufficient to bring men to see the light of the gospel truth and to lead them to repentance and to the performance of acts meet for repentance."[39]

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[36] John Wesley, The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. by Nehemiah Curnock, I (Standard ed.; London: Epworth Press, 1938), 423. Hereafter referred to as Journal.

[37] Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today, p. 165.

[38] Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 383; cf. Spicer, The Way from Sin to Sanctification, p. 46.

Whereas for American Methodism repentance was viewed as a secondary condition of salvation, the immediate condition was faith. Faith, according to Wilbur Fisk, is "the grand, and indeed the only immediate condition of the work of grace upon the heart."[40] It is "that mental state directly antecedent to the giving up of the soul into the hands of divine mercy."[41]

John Wesley had described religious faith as a kind of knowing, but a knowing which reaches down into the very innermost parts of one's being. In his famous sermon, "Salvation by Faith," delivered within weeks of his Aldersgate experience, Wesley referred to saving faith as not just "a speculative, rational thing, a cold, lifeless assent, a train of ideas in the head; but also a disposition of the heart."[42] That faith, however, did imply for Wesley an act of the head as well as the heart is made more clear by the following statement:

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[39] Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, p. 113.

[40] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, p. 268.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Wesley, Works, V, 9.

> Christian faith is, then, not only an assent to the whole gospel of Christ, but also a full reliance in the blood of Christ; a trust in the merits of his life, death, and resurrection; a recumbency upon him as our atonement and our life, as given for us, and living in us; and in consequence hereof, a closing with him, and a cleaving to him, as our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption, or in one word, our salvation.[43]

In a sermon preached by Ezekiel Cooper at the funeral of Francis Asbury, Cooper repeated in substance the Wesleyan idea of saving faith.

> [Saving] faith is the voluntary exercise of our rational, moral, and credent capacity, in the firm belief of the truth of God in Jesus Christ; under the influence, and authority, of divine testimony, and evangelical evidence, set home, with divine power upon the soul and producing a supernatural conviction, or the witness of God, upon the heart and mind;....[44]

This definition of saving or evangelical faith represents an effort on the part of Cooper, along with Wesley, to account for a personal unity in the act of faith. Methodism in general described it as an act of the human subject in which head and heart joined together in one unified response. There were, however, present in the writings of early American Methodism vestiges of the faculty psychology language. This language had been predominant in previous centuries, particularly among Puritan divines. The proponents of faculty psychology tended to conceive of the human faculties in terms of distinct entities with each entity performing a particular function. Hence, when such language was used to describe the response of faith, the intellect was described as fulfilling one given role and the will another. In this context one was faced with the problem of determining which faculty was the more dominant. The minister, and particularly, the Puritan divines, when describing the response of faith, more often than not focused upon the distinct function of each faculty rather than upon the unified act of the human subject. Conrad Cherry, in his reappraisal of the theology of Jonathan Edwards, cited Thomas Manton, a seventeenth century English divine, as articulating a view of faith which was the natural consequence of the faculty-psychology theme. Cherry noted that for Manton there were three distinct acts of faith.

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[43] Ibid.

[44] Ezekiel Cooper, The Substance of a Funeral Discourse on the Death of the Rev. Francis Asbury (Philadelphia: Jonathan Pounder, 1819), p. 145.

> (1) assent, or a believing rationally in God's truth; (2) consent, which is 'a hearty acceptance of Christ,' and a 'practical act of the new nature'; and (3) affiance, trust, dependence, or confidence - a 'quiet repose of heart in the mercy of God or fidelity of Christ, that he will give me pardon and life....'[45]

The separation of faith into three distinct acts of assent, consent, and affiance fits quite naturally in a chronological sequence of functions performed by the separate faculties.

Frequently the Methodist writers described faith in terms of assent, consent, and affiance or trust. In his sermon, "Salvation by Faith," Peter Sandford extensively examined the meaning of faith. Faith, according to Sandford, implied an assent to the truths of the Scriptures such as the divinity of Christ Jesus, the sacrificial character of his death, and his continued mediation in man's behalf.[46] This assent of the mind "must be accompanied by the full and unreserved consent of his own heart, to receive [Christ], in his true character, and all his offices."[47] There follows "a sure trust and confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ, as leads the sinner to abandon himself without any reserve, to confide all to his care, for time and eternity."[48] Laurence Kean likewise described faith in the threefold aspect.

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[45] Taken from "The Mind" of Jonathan Edwards, ed. and reconstructed by Leon Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963), p. 121. Quoted in Conrad Cherry, The Theology of Jonathan Edwards (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1966), p. 17.

> To assent to the truths of God,...to consent to the conditions of salvation, in repentance and believing the Gospel, and to rely on the great atonement offered for the whole world,...[this is true faith].[49]

In an article which appeared in The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review, Laban Clark also employed the threefold distinction.

> The faith by which we are justified is not only a full and cordial consent of the mind to the truth of Christ, and the reality of his sacrificial death; but it is trusting in him, confiding all to him, and receiving him with all the heart; our affections going out after him, and our whole trust being placed in him; relying on the merits of his death, we embrace him as God made unto us wisdom and righteousness.[50]

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[46] Sandford, "Salvation by Faith," The Methodist Preacher, p. 195.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] Kean, A Plain and Positive Refutation, p. 254.

[50] Laban Clark, "Justification," The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review, XIV (1832), 21.

That American Methodism did use language which was reminiscent of an earlier tendency to assign a particular function to a specific faculty is quite clear. However, with Methodism, the prime intent was not to ascribe to a particular faculty a distinct function but to emphasize that the whole of the individual was caught up in the response of faith. Or, to return to a previous statement, faith for Methodism, whether in England or America, was a knowledge, a knowledge which goes deep and is felt at the very center of one's being. Here, American Methodism was but restating the theme of the Wesleyan tradition, which also was characteristic of traditional Protestant thought since the Reformation. Faith, while noetic, goes beyond the noetic to the fiducial. It is the unified act of the human subject which embraces both knowledge and trust. This emphasis is well expressed in Peter Sandford's summary definition of faith. Faith, he concluded, "is the gift of God, by that immediate illumination and gracious energy, which are afforded to the penitent sinner, enabling him to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ with a heart unto righteousness."[51]

This examination of American Methodism's understanding of saving faith began with Wilbur Fisk's observation that faith alone was the immediate condition of salvation. It would seem, then, that faith is man's own act. This is true, in a qualified sense. As noted above, faith was understood as the gift of God to man. It was said to be a gift by virtue of the fact that its object, Christ, which inspires faith, is of God. Further it is a gift in that the power which enables a man to believe comes from God. Then, too, it is the Spirit which influences man to exercise this power. The exercise of faith, that is, the act per se, is man's own act, but always man's act in conjunction with divine act.[52] It represents man's "act of embracing Christ."[53] Peter Sandford's analogous explanation of faith is helpful at this point. He described the response of faith as being comparable to a situation in which a beggar is offered some food. The only condition connected with the offer is that he must come to the table and receive it. In the event that the beggar should decide to receive the gift, there would be nothing meritorious or efficacious about his responding to the invitation. The act of his coming to the table and receiving the food would be the beggar's own act. In that through this act the beggar appropriates the offer of food, the act is said to be the condition of his being satisfied.[54]

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[51] Sandford, "Salvation by Faith," The Methodist Preacher, p. 195.

For the early American Methodists, saving faith was the subjective appropriation of the objective offer of grace. Hence, as they contended, it is at one and the same time a gift of God and a response of the individual. With this emphasis American Methodism continued the Reformation theme, handed on to them by John Wesley, of salvation by grace through faith.

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[52] Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 380.

[53] Olin, Works, I, 381.

[54] Sandford, "Salvation by Faith," The Methodist Preacher, pp. 191f.

But what does grace effect in the life of the individual? Or, to put the question more properly, what does the Spirit of God effect in the individual and how does he do it? These are the questions which must now be considered. Early American Methodism understood the work of God to be accomplished in, or appropriated to the individual according to a rather specific pattern or order of salvation which included conviction, conversion, and sanctification. In his sermon, "Love to God and Man," James Watson enumerated the specific order of salvation and briefly described each phase.

> Penitently to feel, deplore, and confess his helpless guilt and depravity, and need for a Savior, is conviction. For the heart to be retouched by the same all-powerful Spirit that made it at first, is regeneration or conversion. And the first emotions of affectionate, moral approbation for God, his truth, his image, that succeed this spiritual change, are the beginnings of love to God. Sanctification is this love, reigning supreme and triumphing over everything that opposes.[55]

The concept of a particular order of salvation was certainly not unique to American Methodists. The preaching of the evangelical revivals of the previous century in America and England laid out before the listeners certain steps to follow toward salvation. Leonard J. Trinterud, in his study on colonial Presbyterianism, observed that the evangelical Puritans described the way of salvation in terms of a pilgrimage.

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[55] James Watson, "Love to God and Man," The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit, collected and revised by Davis W. Clark, ed. by George Peck (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1848), p. 268. See Scott, "The Message of Early American Methodism," The History of American Methodism, I, 291-307.

> The Holy Spirit...called men out of the city of destruction and sent them on a pilgrimage to the celestial city. This pilgrimage led through 'the terrors of the law' under which the sinner saw his self-righteousness compared with the law of God and was driven to abandon all hope of being saved by his own goodness or efforts. When, then, he saw afar off the righteousness of Christ, which alone could save him, he was led on his journey by that sight. Passing through the gate of repentance, he found himself at the foot of the cross. There he laid down his burden of guilt and knew his sins forgiven. Looking up, he saw before him now the road that henceforth was to be his only home.[56]

Trinterud noted that in time there grew out of this pilgrimage concept the "ordo salutis" of Federal Theology, i.e., "the logical sequence of several stages or steps in salvation."[57]

John Wesley, along with his Puritan counterparts followed a general order of salvation. In his sermon, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," Wesley outlined the following steps:

> (1) The work of prevenient grace in the natural man; (2) repentance before justification; (3) justification or forgiveness with its effects: peace, joy, and hope - assurance; (4) new birth which brings a sense of God's love through the gift of the Holy Spirit and is the beginning of

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[56] Leonard J. Trinterud, The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1949), p. 174.

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 176.

> the real change in man - sanctification; (5) repentance after justification; (6) the gradual work of sanctification; and (7) entire sanctification - perfect love.[58]

Wesley on another occasion offered a more concise order of salvation. "Our famous doctrines, which include all the rest, are three, - that of repentance, of faith, and of holiness. The first of these we account, as it were, the porch of religion; the next, the door; the third, religion itself."[59] In a different context Wesley, using the same simile, spoke of repentance or conviction as the porch, justification as the door and sanctification as the house of religion.[60]

The precedent for describing the work of salvation in the individual in terms of a particular order had been well-established. The American Methodists continued this practice. Indeed, they found such a classification to be a very handy tool for the evangelistic endeavors. This schema was simply that, a tool. It was not thought of in terms of an end, but the path which one traveled to the desired end, salvation, present and future.

The first stage in the order of salvation, according to the American Methodists, was conviction. Thomas Morris spoke for the whole of Methodism when he asserted that

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[58] Wesley, Sermons, II, 444-448.

[59] Wesley, Works, VIII, 472.

[60] John Wesley, The Letters of the Rev. John Wesley, A.M., ed. by John Telford, II (Standard ed.; London: The Epworth Press, 1931) 268.

"conversion, in all instances, is preceded by conviction, ..."[61] Underlying this statement was the basic assumption that no one individual would ever seek help unless he clearly saw the need for it. That is, a person could never be expected to be overly concerned about his salvation if he had no real awareness of his true condition as a sinful man. In short, as Tobias Spicer reasoned:

> No man is likely to apply to a physician for help until he believes he is sick, nor will a sick man be alarmed until he thinks there is danger of his dying.. We make no effort to escape danger until we think danger exists; and thus it is in regard to the subject of religion. Men will not seek the salvation of their souls until they believe they are sinners - until they perceive the evil and danger of sin.[62]

But what is the nature of conviction? Thomas Morris in language characteristic of Methodist sermonizing, described conviction as that work which is "wrought by the agency of the Holy Spirit, causing the Word of God to be quick and powerful, sharper than a two edged sword, laying opon the exceeding sinfulness of [man's] nature."[63] Herein a person is brought to a "heartfelt sense of his guilt and his utterly lost estate."[64]

The above definition of conviction in view of its brevity and simplicity leaves something to be desired. Of course, one must acknowledge that the Methodist preacher as a rule never purposed in his sermon to enter into a meticulous analysis of a given evangelical concept. The definition by Thomas Morris, however, is helpful, not because of what is explicit, but because of what is implicit in it. Hence, it provides an excellent point of departure for some further comments on Methodism's understanding of conviction.

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[61] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 88.

[62] Spicer, The Way from Sin to Sanctification, pp. 11f.

[63] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 88.

[64] Ibid.

Previously it was observed that American Methodism ascribed the appropriation of salvation to the agency of the Holy Spirit. It was precisely at the point of conviction that the Holy Spirit was said to begin the work of effecting man's salvation. American Methodism described the work of the Holy Spirit upon the individual in the Augustinian sense of illumination. Methodism stressed as much as traditional Calvinism the serious consequences which resulted from man's disobedience. Sin left the understanding confused, the senses dulled. No longer was man capable of appreciating the beauty of Christ or comprehending the awefulness of the sin which entrapped him. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, wherein he illumines or enlightens the individual, there is brought to that person a new sensitivity. Under the impact of the Spirit, the individual "discovers the moral infection adhering to [his] nature,...."[65] This new awareness of his moral status gives rise to a "just apprehension of the turpitude of his guilt,...."[66] Conviction was not simply a bent of mind. It was a matter which was deeply felt. The illuminating impact of the Spirit was compared to the rays of the sun "that warm and quicken into life; it makes a sinner not only see that he is a sinner, but feel that he is."[67]

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[65] Lambord, "The Soul Transformed by a Believing View of God," The Methodist Preacher, p. 99.

From the preceding it is clear that Methodism viewed conviction as being accomplished through the agency of the Spirit. By the influence of the Spirit, a person is enabled to see himself for what he is. He is brought to a point where he despairs of finding help within himself. This moment constitutes the first step or stage in Methodism's order of salvation. "The second material point in experimental religion," Thomas Morris wrote, "is conversion."[68] Conversion for the American Methodists must not be confused with conviction. Conversion for the American Methodists must not be confused with conviction. Timothy Merritt, in his helpful work, *The Convert's Guide and Preacher's Assistant*, warned that "one should not suppose that he is converted merely because he has lamented over his sins."[69] Nathan Bangs shared this concern. He was assured that many judged themselves to be saints when in reality they had only been "awakened."[70] The point which American Methodists desired to make was that while conviction was definitely a work of the Spirit, it was but preparatory to conversion. It "imparts light,...it quickens emotions,...and moral sensibilities,...[it] makes us capable of acting as we ought," i.e., to repent and believe.[71] In brief, for Methodism, the distinction between conviction and conversion was the difference between being "awakened" and being "renewed."[72]

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[66] James Smith, "On the Incapacity of the Natural Man to Receive the Things of the Spirit of God," *The Methodist Preacher* (Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853), p. 103.

[67] Spicer, *The Way from Sin to Sanctification*, p. 41.

[68] Morris, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, p. 301.

[69] Timothy Merritt, *The Convert's Guide and Preacher's Assistant* (New York: George Lane, 1841), p. 16.

In the broad sense of the word American Methodism used the term, conversion, to include a pardon for sin and the changing of one's nature by the Holy Spirit. That is, in theological jargon, conversion was understood as embracing both justification and regeneration. These were understood as being concomitant. While occurring simultaneously they are to be distinguished, though the distinction is more logical than temporal. The distinction commonly made for the sake of clarity was described analogously by Henry Whiteman in his sermon, "Freedom from Sin." Whiteman imagined a situation in which a person, who had been imprisoned for a number of years, was finally released and sent home to live the life of a free man. However, this man refused to live a responsible life, but remained that "demon like creature" that caused him to be sent to prison in the first place. The obvious conclusion to be made is that there had been no real change in the man while he was in prison. Whiteman argued that such would be the case if the man of faith received only the declaration of pardon without any work of regeneration. However, Whiteman concluded, "the great truth of the Christian religion that God's gracious smile of pardon...is accompanied with that operation of the spirit by which the soul is regenerated...."[73] American Methodism consistently made this distinction. Laban Clark explained:

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[70] Bangs, The Reformer Reformed, p. 131.

[71] Spicer, The Way from Sin to Sanctification, p. 31.

[72] Ibid.

> Justification is a judiciary act, by which the relative state of a sinner is changed by the remission of sins that are past; whereas regeneration is a real change of heart by the renewing operations of the spirit of grace, through which he becomes a new creature.[74]

This distinction was a characteristic emphasis in the thought of John Wesley.

> Though it be allowed, that justification and the new birth are, in point of time, inseparable from each other, yet they are easily distinguished, as being not the same, but things of widely different nature. Justification implies only a relative, the new birth a real, change. God in justifying us does something for us; in begetting us again, He does a work in us. The former changes our outward relation to God, so that of enemies we become children; by the latter our inmost souls are changed, so that of sinners we become saints. The one restores us to the favour, the other to the image, of God. The one is taking away the guilt, the other is taking away the power of sin: so that, although they are joined together in point of time, yet are they of wholly distinct

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[73] Henry Whiteman, "Freedom from Sin," Sermons on Miscellaneous Subjects by the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Senior Preachers of the Ohio and North Ohio Conferences (Cincinnati: Swormstedt and Poe, 1853), p. 381.

[74] Clark, "Justification," The Methodist Magazine and Quarterly Review, XIV (1832), 22.

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From the distinctions made by Wesley and the American Methodists, enough has been said to show that their understanding of justification _per se_ was true to the classic forensic character of reformation theology. For Methodism, justification signaled a gracious declaration by God of the individual's pardon and acceptance. Peter Sandford, in quite traditional language, described justification as "an act of divine grace whereby God, in his character of our Sovereign and Judge, freely for Christ's sake, forgives us all our past sins, receives us in his favor and takes us under his protection."[76] Justification, then, was held to be an act of acquittal. It is not the sum of the experience of salvation. Concomitantly, the work of regeneration was effected by the Holy Spirit. Whereas by the former, man was declared to enjoy a new status, by the latter, he was made a new creature.

It was precisely this emphasis on the concomitant character of justification and regeneration which distinguished American Methodists, along with John Wesley, from the more characteristic theme of the reformers. As Colin Williams observed:

> In the theology of Luther and Calvin the emphasis remains on justification. The fact that the believer is _simul justus et peccator_ and that Christ is our

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[75] Wesley, _Sermons_, I, 298-300.

[76] Sandford, "Salvation by Faith," _The Methodist Preacher_, p. 188.

> 'alien righteousness,' holds the center of attention in such a way that the transformation of the believer, though real, is secondary. But in Wesley, [and the same applies for the American Methodists] while justification is the foundation of the Christian life, the center of attention moves to the transforming work of the Spirit in the life of the justified.[77]

Conversion, which, in its more restricted meaning, is synonymous with regeneration, was described by American Methodism in numerous ways. It was said to be "that work of divine grace whereby the Holy Spirit operates on the moral powers of our nature, and transforms them into the image of God."[78] Elsewhere, regeneration was described as "that important change,...[in which] the principles of moral holiness are wrought into the dispositions and affections of the heart...."[79] Or again, it is the "imparting of a principle of divine love to the soul by which it is inclined to holiness and virtue...."[80]

Conversion, then, was viewed as an actual change brought about in the individual by the work of the Holy Spirit whereby the person is made a new creation. Having said this, one is again faced with the necessity of uncovering just what is implicit in this summary statement. In seeking to understand American Methodism's idea of regeneration, it seems that it would be helpful at this point to recall briefly its view of fallen man.

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[77] Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today, pp. 100f.

[78] Sandford, "Salvation by Faith," The Methodist Preacher, p. 189.

[79] Merritt, "The Nature and Necessity of the New Birth," The Methodist Preacher, p. 69.

[80] Sandford, "Salvation by Faith," The Methodist Preacher, p. 190.

In a prior discussion it was noted that American Methodism viewed the consequence of man's disobedience in grave terms. It was not that the original faculties were destroyed by sin. Rather, they were distorted. Conscience, that moral faculty residing in the intellect became subject to the affections. The ascendency of the affections rendered the will the ineffective synthesizer of all actions. Because of this disruption of the faculties, man no longer was able to function in a manner commensurate with the original purpose of his creation, i.e., to be the man toward God.[81]

Wilbur Fisk, who more than any of his cohorts, examined the nature of regeneration, felt the work of regeneration in the final analysis was accomplished in the affections. The affections, for Fisk, were the seat of man's depraved nature, and these must be renovated.[82] Timothy Merritt concurred with Fisk. In his sermon, "The Nature and Necessity of the New Birth," Merritt stated that there was a need to implant "the principles of moral holiness...in the dispositions and affections of the heart."[83] While contending that the affections had been greatly disrupted by man's disobedience, it was asserted that the work of regeneration must begin with the understanding or intellect. Merritt argued that it was the enlightened mind which leads to the regeneration of the inward man.[84] This was the emphasis developed by Fisk. The intellect, which is the seat of the conscience, is capable of knowing right and wrong. The affections, however, are in direct hostility to the judgments of conscience and the feeling of moral obligation, and thwart the moral judgments of conscience. Conscience, however, is not silenced. Rather, its judgments cannot be willed into action. This inability to overcome the control of the affections drives one to despair. Then it is, "under the enlightening influences of grace, and the drawings of the Spirit," that the individual is brought to the point of repentance and faith. Upon these conditions the Spirit "changes the character and current of the unholy affections." This, Fisk concluded, is regeneration.[85]

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[81] See Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, pp. 243f.

[82] Ibid.,

[83] Merritt, "The Nature and Necessity of the New Birth," The Methodist Preacher, p. 69.

This examination of regeneration by Fisk represents more the exception than the rule. On the whole American Methodism focused its energies on urging men toward the experience of conversion rather than on an analysis of the experience. And, as Fisk explained, it was not necessary for one to understand the metaphysics of regeneration to experience it.[86]

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[84] Merritt, The Convert's Guide and Preacher's Assistant, p. 125.

[85] Fisk, Calvinistic Controversy, pp. 243f.

[86] Ibid., p. 253.

The Methodists were one in agreeing that regeneration was a transforming act of God's Spirit which occurred at a particular moment in time. Those preparatory measures so necessary to man's conversion were usually gradual.[87] Benjamin Lambord expressed the consensus in the following:

> ...as a man can be dying for some time before he actually expires, so, in the crucifixion of our old man, there is a painful course of mortification and heart rending agency, until sin is separated from the soul. In that instant, he is dead to sin; and, as the soul cannot remain a vacuum, it is filled with the love of God.[88]

The transforming experience effected in the man of faith through the agency of the Holy Spirit was said to be at one and the same time an instantaneous, yet progressive work. Regeneration was commonly described as the point of beginning. In scriptural terms it is said to be a new birth. As the physical birth but marks the beginning of a life of growth and development, so spiritual regeneration is followed by spiritual growth. Salvation "is begun at the moment of our justification and completed in the entire sanctification of our nature."[89] Sanctification constitutes the third stage or phase in Methodism's order of salvation.

As in the previous stages of salvation, American Methodism continued to focus on the experience rather than upon the doctrine. Within American Methodism during the first half of the nineteenth century there was little original thinking or writing in respect to the doctrine of Christian Perfection.[90]

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[87] Ibid., p. 263.

[88] Lambord, "The Soul Transformed by a Believing View of God," The Methodist Preacher, p. 98.

[89] Sandford, "Salvation by Faith," The Methodist Preacher, p. 189.

Basic to the idea of Christian perfection was the conviction that if the Holy Spirit were able to renew a man in any degree, he surely could renew him fully.[91] The fact that such a complete renewal does not take place all at one time must not be attributed to a lack of power or desire on the part of the Spirit. The limitation is with man. Prior to any declaration of pardon or any initial act of renewal by the Spirit, a person's concern is focused more on peace and pardon than on sanctification. Indeed, as George Peck explained, "Only by the help of converting grace is one able to see his hidden corruption,"[92] and hence the need of entire sanctification. To be sure the initial work of regeneration is experienced as a glorious act. However, when the ecstacy of the moment passes, the individual discovers the need for a more complete work of grace. There is still present sin in the believer. "Sin is subjected," Peck wrote, "but is not wholly taken away - the body of sin is nailed to the cross, but still occasionally struggles."[93] The work of sanctification has been initiated, but awaits completion. Such a person is but a "babe in Christ."[94] He enjoys periods of rejoicing, but frequently these periods are followed by extreme darkness, and "so it will be until the carnal mind is destroyed, and our wills brought wholly into subjection to the will of God."[95]

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[90] While American Methodism throughout the period under study viewed sanctification as a specific stage in the order of salvation, the one striking factor about this period is the paucity of material devoted to the subject. In his helpful study, Christian Perfection and American Methodism, John Peters has observed that throughout the first four decades of the nineteenth century, American Methodism looked to the writers in English Methodism (see pp. 102ff). The general attitude seemed to be that the English Methodists had said what needed to be said. The standard work in Christian perfection, written by George Peck in 1842, was for the most part a restatement of the theme as developed by John Wesley, John Fletcher, et al.

[91] John Bangs, Autobiography of Rev. John Bangs of the New York Annual Conference (New York: Printed for the author, 1846), p. 68.

[92] George Peck, The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection Stated and Defended (7th ed.; New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1854), p. 353. Hereafter referred to as The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection.

Sanctification was viewed in terms of a work and a state. In respect to the former, sanctification was considered to be the "subjugation of the body of sin," and indeed, "its complete destruction" through the application of the atoning work of Christ by the agency of the Holy Spirit.[96] As a state, it was described as the life of Christian perfection which implies freedom from sin and complete dedication to God.[97] Or, in words reminiscent of Wesley, Peck stated that Christian perfection is perfection in love. Love for God becomes the law of life. When one is made perfect in love, Peck observed, "all the sensibilities of the soul are restored to their appropriate objects, and the voluntary power is conformed to the will of God,...."[98] The man perfected in love is truly the man toward God. Here, Peck has caught in essence Wesley's understanding of Christian perfection. William Cannon summarized Wesley's position as follows:

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[93] Ibid., p. 32.

[94] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 302.

[95] Ibid., p. 55.

[96] Peck, The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection, p. 35.

[97] Ibid., p. 37.

> Christian perfection, for Wesley, means, therefore, only one thing, and that is purity of motive: the love of God, freed entirely from all the corruption of nature desire and emancipated completely from any interest in self or in any other person or thing apart from God, guides unhindered every thought and every action of a man's life.[99]

This is the state toward which everyone should aspire.

> O what a heaven is this! when love dwells in the heart, looks out of the eye; beams in the face, breathes from the lips, distils from the hands, moves in the feet, and creates an atmosphere all around which angels might delight to inhale![100]

To what degree the American Methodists as a whole consciously experienced such a state of perfection is difficult to determine. Ezekiel Cooper observed at the turn of the nineteenth century that many of his hearers expressed a concern for holiness of heart and life. There were some, he felt, who "experienced it, but it did not go on to an extensive degree."[101] Nathan Bangs, writing toward the midpoint of the century observed that as far as he could see, many within the Methodist community, preacher and layman alike, were "groaning after Christian Perfection" but had not come into the experience.[102]

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[98] Ibid., p. 39. See also John Summerfield, Sermons and Sketches of Sermons (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1842), p. 204.

[99] Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, p. 241.

[100] Summerfield, Sermons and Sketches of Sermons, p. 204.

The observations of Cooper and Bangs suggest that what was preached as the ideal was not always experienced as the actual. Yet the work of sanctification which leads to the state of perfect love must be the goal toward which all should strive. This, in the words of John Wesley, was the "house" of Christian experience.[103] It was held to be the secret of the believer's enjoyment of "an holy God...in this world [and] the world to come."[104] Though Wilbur Fisk, at one point, confessed to the waning of the experience in his own life, he did not cease to encourage others to seek after it. In a letter written to two former parishioners, he listed the following instruction for obtaining sanctification:

> (1) Believe that it is attainable; and, when you get this degree of faith, fix your mind there.
> (2) ...believe that this experience is for you.

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[101] Phoebus, Beams of Light in Early Methodism in America, p. 94.

[102] Nathan Bangs, The Present State, Prospects, and Responsibilities of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Lane and Scott, 1850), p. 59.

[103] Wesley, The Letters ofthe Rev. John Wesley, A.M., II, 263.

[104] Hibbard, Memoirs, p. 170.

> (3) ...believe that the more difficult the case, the more ready the great physician is to offer his assistance,....The Lord Jesus delights to search out and afford assistance to the greatest sinner.[105]

The _ordo salutis_ in the writings of early American Methodism have been considered at some length. Prior to this examination of the order of salvation, attention was given to Methodism's understanding of repentance and faith, noting in what sense these were said to be conditions of salvation. But, where do repentance and faith fit into the Methodist schema of conviction, conversion, and sanctification? Here again Methodism distinguished itself from traditional Calvinism. Calvinism had held that repentance and faith, or more correctly, faith and repentance follow conversion. According to the Calvinists, there could be no true act of faith or repentance until the natural man had first received a new principle. The infusion of this new principle of action in the soul, accomplished through the agency of the Holy Spirit, was called regeneration or conversion. The American Methodists, in keeping with their Wesleyan tradition, held that following conviction, wherein man sees and feels his sin in the most convincing manner, the individual through repentance and faith reaches out to accept the gracious offer of salvation. Salvation begins with conversion, which in the broad sense includes justification and regeneration, and then, from this point, one progresses toward sanctification.

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[105] Holdich, _Life of Wilbur Fisk, D.D._, pp. 105f.

The preaching of early American Methodism was consciously directed toward leading man through the various stages in the order of salvation. Indeed, in "The Matter and Manner of Preaching," a supplement to the tenth edition of the Discipline, Bishop Coke and Asbury gave explicit instructions for their ministers to follow such a practice. The first responsibility of the minister is as follows:

> ...convince the sinner of his dangerous condition ...set forth the depth of original sin, and show the sinner how far he is gone from original righteousness; he must describe the vices of the world in their just and most striking colours, and enter into all the sinner's pleas and excuses for sin, and drive him from all his subterfuges and strongholds.[106]

After the sinner has been convinced of his "dangerous condition," the minister must proceed to "bring the mourner to a present Savior: he must show the willingness of Christ this moment to bless him, and bring a present salvation home to his soul."[107] The minister must then proceed to show the new believer the remaining sin in his life and "he must anatomize the human heart, and follow self-will and self-love through all their windings,...with great tenderness.... He must describe to them, in all its richest views, the blessings of perfect love."[108]

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[106] The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church, to which is added in Appendix: "Extracts from the Notes to the Discipline," by Thomas Coke and Francis Asbury (New York: George Lane, 1840), pp. 310f. The original notes appeared in the 1798 edition of the Discipline.

[107] Ibid., p. 311.

[108] Ibid.

The American Methodists took these instructions to heart. In a sermon delivered during American Methodism's semi-centennial year, Freeborn Garrettson stated the purpose of preaching as follows:

> The design of preaching is to awaken sinners, and to bring them to Christ; to urge believers to the attainment of holiness of heart and life; to show the sinners the turpitude of their hearts, and the sinfulness of their practice, and to bring them to the foot of the cross, stripped of self and all self dependence;....[109]

"The Christian orator," Wilbur Fisk explained, "takes hold of the heart; bends the will; alarms the fears; and excites hope; mollifies the ferocious passions; changes the current of the mind; renews the affections, and transforms the soul."[110] Such a statement as this can only be understood in the context of Methodism's constant stress upon the idea of prevenient grace which constitutes the individual a fit subject to hear and indeed to respond to the preached word. It was not that Fisk, or American Methodism as a whole, purposed to discredit the agency of the Holy Spirit in effecting man's salvation. Rather, it was the Methodist position that the Spirit works in and through the preaching of the gospel. For this reason it was felt that the minister was under the necessity of directing the contents of his message toward convincing the individual of his low estate and leading him into the way of salvation.

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[109] Freeborn Garrettson, Substance of the Semi-Centennial Sermon Before the New York Annual Conference, at its Session, May, 1826 (New York: Bangs and Emory, n.d.), p. 33.

[110] Wilbur Fisk, Substance of a Discourse Preached at Wilbraham, Massachusetts on the Occasion of the Death of Rev. W. Hyde (Boston: Ela, 1833), p. 6.

The sermon, more often than not, included many of the basic themes of the evangelical message. After describing in general the intent or purpose of the sermon, Freeborn Garrettson, in his semi-centennial sermon went on to enumerate some of the concepts which should be present in the sermon. These included:

> ...the old Methodistical doctrines of justification by faith; the direct evidence from God, through faith in the merits of Christ, of the forgiveness of sins; and the adoption into his family. Nor are we to be ashamed of that unfashionable doctrine, Christian perfection: but we should point out clearly, a travail of the soul, not only for justification, but for sanctification and the evidence of it....[111]

In an essay written around the middle of the nineteenth century, Abel Stevens observed that American Methodism during its early period consistently brought these fundamental tenets to the attention of the people.

> Seldom did the man who was inquiring 'What shall I do to be saved?' hear a Methodist preacher, without bearing away with him the precise answer. The lost condition of the soul by nature, repentance toward God, faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, justification, sanctification, the witness of the Spirit - such truths seemed to make up the alphabet out of which the very syllabification of their discourses were formed; so that it may be said, with but little qualification that whosoever heard an ordinary Methodist sermon, however casually, thenceforward knew most, if not all, of the doctrine s

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[111] Garrettson, *Substance of the Semi-Centennial Sermon Before the New York Annual Conference, at its Session, May, 1826*, p. 33.

of grace.[112]

While the characteristic sermon of the period under study was replete with the essentials of the evangelical faith, these basic concepts were for the most part presented in a rather straightforward,, simplistic manner. American Methodism consciously attempted to avoid using the pulpit as a platform for theological disputations. The purpose of the sermon was to elicit an evangelical response of faith, not to wage a polemical warfare. With this end in mind, the Methodist preacher was not content merely to present the essentials of the Christian message, though, to be sure, these basic themes were a part of his message. However, the preachers of early American Methodism felt that they had not fulfilled their duty until they had urged the listener in the most convincing manner possible to make his decision for Christ. The practice of Jesse Lee, as described by his biographer, was quite characteristic.

> He would excite them in some way. He would make them weep, if he could; bringing his fine voice, warm affections, and glowing eloquence to bear upon this result, with strong and earnest intensity. If he failed in this, he would essay to alarm them into deep and solemn warning of words and manner; and, if all failed, he would shake their sides with some pertinent anecdote; and

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[112] Abel Stevens, Essays on the Preaching Required by the Times, and the Best Methods of Obtaining It; with Reminiscences and Illustrations of Methodist Preaching. Including Rules for Extemporaneous Preaching, and Characteristic Sketches of Olin, Fisk, Bascom, Cookman, Summerfield, and other Noted Extemporaneous Preachers (New York: Carlton and Phillips, 1855), pp. 121f.

> then, having moved them, seek, by all appliances of truth, earnestness, and affection, to guide their stirred up thoughts and sympathies to the fountain of living waters.[113]

Billy Hibbard related in his Memoirs that on one occasion, after having preached to a gathering of people at some length, he felt impressed to urge the people to make their decision then and there. To this end, Hibbard remarked, "I endeavored to illustrate the awful state of the damned. I spoke of the lake of fire, and the wrath of God, like a furious storm of vengeance, raising the lake in surging waves with tremendous war."[114]

The above references suggest that frequently the preachers of early American Methodism turned to descriptive imagery in order to move their listeners to a point of decision. Wilbur Fisk, who, more than any of the other early American Methodists, demonstrated some theological astuteness, was known to have relied on this emotive rhetoric to arouse the people to action.[115]

That the common people did respond to such preaching is attested by the phenomenal growth of Methodism in America during the first half of the nineteenth century. It is fair to say that for the most part this response by the general populace was more emotional than intellectual. That is, the people were moved to a decision by what they felt more than by what they fully understood.

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[113] Leroy M. Lee, The Life and Times of the Rev. Jesse Lee (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1860), pp. 351f.

[114] Hibbard, Memoirs, p. 229.

[115] Holdich, Life of Wilbur Fisk, D.D., p. 336.

Characteristic of many of the services of early American Methodism was the overt manifestation of emotionalism. These excesses quite naturally were the outgrowth of Methodism's conscious attempt to effect through its preaching an experiential religion. Where the focus was on experience, it was inevitable that the emotions should play a large role. However, as suggested in the first chapter of this study, one cannot fully appreciate the response of the people apart from the general situation in the American scene. In his article, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth Century America," Ralph Gabriel observed that the extravagances of early frontier living reappeared in the emotional experiences of the converted sinners.[116]

The attitude of the American Methodists toward the emotional outbreaks varied. For some, the outbreaks were but a clear-cut evidence of the presence of the Spirit of God in the service. Jesse Lee, who wrote the first history of American Methodism, related that in one of the first campmeetings to be held on the eastern coast, "the noise occasioned by the cries of the distressed, and the shouts of the saints, was heard at a distance of three miles. Surely," he added, "the Lord was in that place."[117] Others among the

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[116] Gabriel, "Evangelical Religion and Popular Romanticism in Early Nineteenth Century America," Church History, XIX (1950), 38. See also Don Yoder, Pennsylvania Spirituals (Lancaster: Pennsylvania Folklife Society, 1961) for a helpful discussion of the relationship between social conditions and shouts of joy.

[117] Jesse Lee, A Short History of the Methodist in the United States of America (Baltimore: Magill and Clime, 1810), p. 308.

Methodists confessed that the phenomenon was somewhat new to them, but they accepted the outbursts as the work of God. Henry Boehm reported that he was thrilled by what he witnessed in Delaware. "The people got so happy and shouted so loud, they drowned my voice, and leaped for joy, and sometimes they would fall, and lose their strength, and lie for hours in this condition, and then come to praising the Lord." This manifestation of "the power of God," he added, "was something entirely new to me."[118] While conducting a love feast, Thomas Ware witnessed an outbreak in the service. He related that at first he hardly knew how to handle it, but concluded that he would not interfere, believing it was best "to let the Lord work in his own way."[119] Another attitude that was expressed was that these outbursts did indeed represent a work of the Spirit, a work which was needed for the particular times. Abel Stevens noted that there were those who felt that the emotional expressions represented "the providential provision for the counteracting of deism and corruption...[which] threatened that vast country,...and that the astonishing physical phenomena which attended them were necessary means of arresting the popular attention."[120] For Ezekiel Cooper, it was doubtful that the country would have experienced such spiritual awakenings were it not for the outward manifestations of the Spirit's work. In response to the question as to whether or not the work of God could be accomplished without the noise, Cooper later recalled his answer:

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[118] Henry Boehm, Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical of Sixty-Four Years in the Ministry, ed. by J.B. Wakeley (New York: Carlton and Porter, 1866), p. 70.

[119] Thomas Ware, Sketches of the Life and Travels of Rev. Thomas Ware, Who Has Been an Itinerant Methodist Preacher for More than Fifty Years (New York: Lane and Sandford, 1842), p. 170.

[120] Stevens, Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D., p. 150.

> I [did] not know how that might be, but this was certain, [the works of God] were not produced before. I doubted whether they would have been, had not God worked in this extra-ordinary manner; for I did not see or hear of any such effects then being so extensive and general except where there this noise and power attending it, and also observed that it was not the noise producing the effect, but the effect producing the noise.[121]

Freeborn Garrettson expressed a more cautious attitude. He stressed the importance of distinguishing between the excitement of human passions and the operations of the Spirit. Garrettson was certain that when the Spirit of God influences the passions, they will respond. "To suppose...a work of grace without the excitement of human passions, is as great an absurdity as it would be to expect a man to breathe without any movement of lungs, the organs of respiration."[122] However, it does not necessarily follow that every outburst is a work of the Spirit. Garrettson remarked that he had heard "empty sounds" and witnessed "fruitless human exertions," and that these had proven to be most disturbing for him.[123] Indeed, as far as Garrettson was concerned, the excess of "noisy meetings" in a particular county in Delaware had contributed to the decline of vital religion in that area.[124] Nathan Bangs likewise was disturbed by excessive outbreaks. Distressed by the tendency of the people in his church in New York to work up some enthusiasm, Bangs called a congregational meeting in which he went on record as opposing such practices as being derogatory to the character of God and the cause of his church.[125] Freeborn Garrettson spoke for the greater majority of the American Methodists when he said:

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[121] Phoebus, Beams of Light on Early Methodism in America, p. 91

[122] Bangs, The Life of Freeborn Garrettson, p. 170.

[123] Ibid., p. 222.

> Extremes are always dangerous; and happy the man who knows how to keep the golden mean. I am never offended in hearing convinced sinners cry aloud for mercy; neither do I doubt but that the children of God are so happy at times, that they are constrained to shout the praises of God.[126]

The moment of salvation, i.e., initial salvation, was an instant of emotional release. The individual who had experienced a deep sense of his unworthiness to stand before God realized through faith a glorious new life of liberty. It was felt that it would be difficult for one to go through such an experience without having some conscious awareness of the change that had taken place in his life.

> As well might we suppose that a man could be suddenly relieved from severe pain of the body and entire prostration and the prospect of immediate death, and restored to perfect health and strength, with a grateful heart for his recovery, and yet be unconscious of the whole, as

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[124] Ibid., p. 170.

[125] Stevens, Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D., pp. 183f.

[126] Bangs, The Life of Freeborn Garrettson, p. 170.

> suppose a sinner could be converted and not know it.[127]

For American Methodists the actual transformation in the individual was accompanied by an existential assurance of that change. One knows that there has been a change in his life because he feels it. He is conscious of having passed from the darkness into the light. American Methodism, however, did not rest its case for assurance on emotional feeling. Taking their cue from John Wesley, the American Methodists asserted that the assurance of salvation was a reality through the witness of the Spirit. This witness, Wesley had described in terms of a direct and indirect witness. Methodism in America followed this distinction.

John Wesley defined the direct witness of the Spirit as "an inward impression on the soul, whereby the Holy Spirit of God immediately and directly witnessed to my spirit that I am a child of God, that Jesus Christ hath loved me and given himself for me; and that all my sins are blotted out, and I, even I, am reconciled to God."[128] The American Methodists did not add to or subtract from Wesley's idea of the direct witness of the Spirit. Timothy Merritt repeated in substance Wesley's original definition. The witness of the Spirit is "an immediate, direct impression of the Spirit upon the soul of him who seeketh God, that he is pardoned and adopted as a child of God,...."[129]

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[127] Morris, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, p. 285.

[128] Wesley, *Sermons*, I, 208.

[129] Merritt, *The Convert's Guide and Preacher's Assistant*, p. 43; see also Sandford, "Salvation by Faith," *The Methodist Preacher*, p. 198.

The direct witness of the Spirit anticipates the indirect or secondary witness of the Spirit. The first witness gives rise to the second; the second being the presence of the "fruits of the Spirit" in the life of the redeemed person.[130] This assurance comes to the individual as he carefully examines his own life to see whether or not he possesses "the fruits of faith."

> Does it [i.e., his faith] work by love? Does he find that every successive act of his faith draws him into closer communion with God? Does it increase his hatred of sin, and his pleasure in the practice of justice, mercy, and truth? Does it lead him to set his affections on things above, not on things on the earth?[131]

The question might properly be raised as to why there should be an emphasis upon the indirect witness of the Spirit if the Spirit bears directly to the individual an assurance of his salvation. In this instance, Methodism, in America and England as well, was consciously following a very pragmatic course. To speak of an inner witness which does not authenticate itself through the fruits of faith would be to open oneself up to never ending cries of "fanaticism." This, Methodism could do without. Through an emphasis upon an indirect witness which focused attention on the fruits of faith, the direct witness of the Spirit could be substantiated to the individual and to the world as being a true witness.

In this chapter attention has centered on American

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[130] Merritt, The Convert's Guide and Preacher's Assistant, p. 44.

[131] Shinn, Essay on the Plan of Salvation, p. 401.

Methodism's understanding of the ordo salutis and related themes as expressed in its evangelical message. Throughout the chapter it has been clear that Methodism, as a rule, did not attempt a detailed analysis of a specific concept. Indeed with Methodism, as with evangelical Christianity, the particulars of a concept were not the primary concern. The sermon was intended not for explication alone, but first and foremost, it was directed toward effecting experimental religion. To this end, it may include explication, but only as a means of promoting the experience. The sermon was the instrument for leading man into relationship with God. As Stephen Olin stated, the preaching of the Gospel is that "grand ordinance which God has instituted to save souls and to build them up in their most holy faith."[132] It is now fitting to turn to a consideration of the evangelical experience which the Methodist preaching purposed to effect.

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[132] Olin, Works, I, 265.

IV. RELIGION - EXPERIMENTAL AND PRACTICAL

In the preface of his work, John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism, Maximin Piette observed that Methodism occupied a "unique position, by reason of the primacy which it accorded to religious experience."[1] What can be said of Wesleyan Methodism in England is equally applicable to American Methodism. True religion was described by American Methodists as experimental religion, i.e., a religion experienced in the heart and life of the individual. It was not that American Methodism consciously purposed to take lightly the essential doctrines of the evangelical faith. Indeed, as suggested throughout this study, it was Methodism's pragmatic concern for the basic themes which gave rise to its polemical emphasis. The themes discussed in the second chapter of this study were held by American Methodism as presuppositional to its evangelical message. The message was instituted by God as that means for effecting religion in the heart and life of the individual through the agency of the Holy Spirit. Nathan Bangs, who, perhaps as much as any early American Methodist, demonstrated a concern for the basic themes of evangelical Christianity, likewise reflected

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[1] Maximin Piette, "Preface," John Wesley in the Evolution of Protestantism, trans. by J.B. Howard (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1937).

Methodism's stress upon heart religion. In his appraisal of the status of the Methodist church in America, written toward the middle of the nineteenth century, Bangs observed:

> Whatever improvements we may make, however learned, refined, and orthodox our general creed, deep and profound in our researches,...unless the whole be accompanied by the internal agencies of the Holy Spirit, and we have such an experimental knowledge of justification, and sanctification, or, at least, so far a knowledge of the latter as to be earnestly seeking after it,...we shall be nothing more than a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.[2]

In a later context, Bangs commented, "I mean to be understood as expressing something in opposition to mere formalism, to mere creeds and confessions of faith,...." However orthodox these may be, they "do not constitute the essence of that religion of the heart which is comprehended in the phrase, experimental and practical religion."[3]

This emphasis upon the inward and outward character of religion was a theme which American Methodism had inherited from its tradition. In a sermon preached at Oxford, John Wesley set the precedent for Methodism in the years to follow. "Let us," he stated, "take a nearer view of that great work of God among the children of men, which we are used to express by one word, Christianity; not as it implies a set of opinions, a system of doctrines, but as it refers to men's hearts and lives."[4] Or again:

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[2] Bangs, The Present State, Prospects, and Responsibilities of the Methodist Episcopal Church, p. 65.

[3] Ibid., pp. 167f.

[4] Wesley, Works, V, 38.

> The fundamental doctrine of the people called Methodists is: Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the true faith, the faith that works by love; which by means of the love of God, and our neighbor, produces both inward and outward holiness.[5]

Henry Carter made the following comment on John Wesley's understanding of religious experience:

> In expositions of 'the religion of Jesus Christ' John Wesley held two truths in constant equipoise. Christianity, he affirmed, is 'inward holiness,' purity of heart; thus he argued against chill Deism and formal church-going. Christianity is equally 'a social religion,' so much so that 'to turn it into a solitary one is to destroy it'; this in opposition to all forms of mysticism which were in effect a retreat from the obligations and privileges of neighbourliness and from 'commerce' with one's fellow. His teaching in Perfect Love is only rightly understood when these truths are considered together.[6]

Robert Monk concurred in this judgment. In his study, John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage, Monk noted that for Wesley the central focus was upon the experimental nature of religion. This suggests more than mental assent or forms of worship. It implies a "uniquely experienced personal relationship between God and man."[7] The second aspect of Wesley's understanding of religion, as Monk observed, was the conviction that the inner experience expresses itself in the life which the believer lives.[8]

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[5] Wesley, Journal, IV, 419.

[6] Henry Carter, The Methodist Heritage (Nashville, New York: Abingdon Press, 1951), p. 178.

[7] Robert Monk, John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage (New York, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 70.

[8] Ibid.

In this present chapter attention will be focused on this twofold understanding of Christian experience, the experimental and the practical. For American Methodism the essence of Christian experience was holiness of heart and life. The two are joined together inseparably. Billy Hibbard expressed the Methodist conviction when he said that as far as he was concerned, a person "can know nothing of an inward work that does not show itself by outward fruit."[9]

In the previous chapter it was noted that the preaching of American Methodism was aimed at effecting a religious experience through a particular order of salvation, i.e., through conviction, conversion, and sanctification. It is not surprising, then, to find in the more subjective, autobiographical materials that the Methodists described their own religious experience as progressing through these stages.

An examination of the autobiographical writings reveals that there was not one specific set of circumstances under which an individual was first awakened to his need for salvation. Ezekiel Cooper, while having experienced some concern for his spiritual status at a very early age, was seriously convicted under the preaching of Freeborn Garrettson. While listening to Garrettson preach, Cooper received "a remarkable impression upon his mind."

> My conviction was more and more increased. I felt the drawings of the Spirit powerfully in my

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[9] Hibbard, Memoirs, p. 202.

> soul. I wished to be a Christian, felt much concerned that I was not as good as I ought to be, and resolved to try to be good.[10]

This initial conviction which Cooper experienced was soon stifled because, as he observed, there was a lack of Methodist preaching to drive the truths home. He found himself in with a group of young men who were given to vain living.[11] When he was around eighteen, he consented to hear a Methodist preacher again and was "deeply awakened" and there "determined by God's grace...to seek salvation."[12]

> For months I went bowed down in mourning before the Lord, believing there was mercy for me, but not knowing how to secure it. By night I walked the fields in meditation, and brokenness of heart; or, when all were sleeping, would frequently pour our my soul in supplication. In the spring and summer seasons I made the woods my constant resort, walking and meditating, or reading and praying, sometimes prostrate on my face.[13]

However, with Cooper, again his concern subsided until a book of sermons was placed in his hands, and once again his heart was pricked.

> ...my sorrows were overwhelming. My heart was ready to burst assunder with inexpressible anguish ....At length my bitterness of soul rose to its extremity....My pain of mind was more than I knew how to express.[14]

Some early American Methodists witnessed that they experienced a sense of conviction independently of preaching. Nathan Bangs first gave serious thought to his lost condition while recuperating from a siege of sickness. At his father's house his mind "was smitten with anguish." Bangs wrote, "My conscience awoke; all the sins of my life seemed vividly brought to my recollection. Such was the weight of my guilt that I felt as if I should sink into perdition."[15] Henry Boehm recorded that he was seized with deep conviction when he entered his home on one occasion and heard his mother mention his name in prayer. "The mention of my name broke my heart," he wrote, "and melted me into contrition. Tears rolled down my cheeks, and I felt the importance of complying with the command of God: 'My Son, give me thine heart.'"[16]

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[10] Phoebus, Beams of Light on Early Methodism in America, p. 13.

[11] Ibid., p. 15.

[12] Ibid., p. 16.

[13] Ibid., pp. 16f.

[14] Ibid., p. 17.

By whatever means and through whatever experience the early Methodists came under a sense of conviction, more often than not, it was felt in the most convincing manner.[17] Indeed, it might be described as a "sickness unto death."[18] Nathan Bangs described his conviction in such terms.

Sometimes such awful apprehensions of God's just

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[15] Stevens, Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D., p. 19.

[16] Boehm, Reminiscences, Historical and Biographical, of Sixty-Four Years in the Ministry, p. 16.

[17] Francis Asbury represents a notable exception to the general trend. Asbury recorded that he had "no deep convictions"; no consciousness of having "committed any deep known sins." See Asbury, The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury, II, 159.

[18] I have borrowed Kierkegaard's expression. Cf., Søren Kierkegaard, Fear and Trembling and The Sickness Unto Death, trans. by W. Lowrie (Anchor Book ed.; New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1954), p. 142.

> displeasure would seize upon my soul as to embitter all the enjoyments of life, and make me wish for annihilation....No one can tell, but he who has felt the life, the bitter anguish I felt while wandering alone in the forests mourning my hopeless condition; and often, while in the seeming gayeties of life, have I envied the dog his happiness.[19]

Jesse Lee likewise expressed his conviction in terms of a deep anguish. "I would frequently...get [by] myself, and with many tears, pray God to have mercy on my poor soul, and forgive my sins. Sometimes in the open fields," he continued, "I have fallen on my knees in prayer, and wept, till my heart was ready to break."[20] The concern expressed by Billy Hibbard was not totally unlike that of Martin Luther.

> I had some fears that I should not find mercy at last; Nevertheless I prayed heartily that the Lord would spare my life until I could completely repent. At one time I felt encouraged, that if I were faithful, I should repent enough by the time I was thirty years old; but after a while, I began to see that my sins were greater than I had thought them to be, that I had not made sufficient confession to obtain pardon, and now I must go over them again.[21]

These references, while not exhaustive, are representative of the manner in which American Methodists experienced conviction. According to the classification of William James, these are they who experienced the "sick soul."[22] As noted above, there was no particular set of circumstances under which one was first awakened. However, the experience itself followed a rather consistent pattern of an agonized feeling of utter unworthiness along with an overwhelming sense of guilt.[23] At some point in time, frequently after a long period of unrest, there followed a great release, the transforming experience, conversion.

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[19] Stevens, Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D., p. 32.

[20] Stevens, Memorials of the Introduction of Methodism into the Eastern States, p. 17.

[21] Hibbard, Memoirs, pp. 19f.

[22] William James, Varieties of Religious Experience, with a new introduction by Reinhold Niebuhr (New York: Collier Books, 1961), chaps. vi, vii.

The writings of the early American Methodists abound with descriptions of the transforming experience of conversion such as that by Ezekiel Cooper.

> One day, as I was walking alone in the woods, I felt a great encouragement. I knelt down and prayed fervently. Presently I had an opening to my mind of the infinite fulness of Christ, and of the willingness of the Father...to receive me into his favor.[24]

Billy Hibbard recorded that early in his youth he reached a "point of despair...seeing how utterly wretched he was...." He related that he felt he should go alone and pray. While praying he looked up and saw Jesus looking down on him and "this look removed his burden" of sin.[25] The experience of Stephen Olin was typical. In his Life and Letters he wrote:

> For about six weeks, I continued in a state of wretchedness not easily to be described. It was on the 20th of September that...the sun of righteousness rose upon my soul, and healed my wounded spirit.

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[23] Barclay, History of Methodist Missions, Part One, Early American Methodism, 1769-1844, II, 309.

[24] Phoebus, Beams of Light on Early Methodism in America, p. 18.

[25] Hibbard, Memoirs, p. 24.

> I was alone in the woods, I had just risen from my knees, with a heart pressed down with insupportable agony. I was overwhelmed, and melted with a sense of guilt and unworthiness, when, 'in the twinkling of an eye,' I was filled with joy unspeakable. Blessed be God! I was then made happy in his redeeming love, and am happy still.[26]

More often than not, conversion was realized in an emotion-packed moment. There were, of course, notable exceptions. Robert R. Roberts, for example, who was elected Bishop in 1816, witnessed that his own conversion was a more gradual event.

> One day about sunrise...my sins were pardoned, and God, for Christ's sake, accepted me. Before that time, I had frequently had sweet intimations of the goodness and mercy of the Lord. My heart was tender, and I felt as if I could love God and his people. But yet, until that morning, my mind was not at rest. Then everything seemed changed. Nature wore a new aspect, as I arose and went to my work with cheerfulness;....I never had such an alarming view of my condition as some have experienced. My mind was gradually opened; and although I had always led a moral life, I firmly believed that my heart must be changed....I cannot now remember the precise day of my conversion, though the scene as it occurred that morning, has ever been deeply printed on my memory.[27]

Whether gradual or instantaneous, it was described as a release from the burden of the past, from the shackles of sin. It ushered in a glorious new day, the beginnings of a new life in Christ Jesus. Indeed, the moment of conversion was a moment of liberation.[28]

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[26] Olin, Life and Letters, I, 67.

[27] Charles Elliott, The Life of the Rev. Robert R. Roberts, One of the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1844), p. 25.

It was not unusual for those who experienced conversion in an intensely emotional moment subsequently to pass through days of darkness and depression. Stephen Olin, after his conversion, doubted the genuineness of the events of the previous days. He wondered whether or not the change of heart was but a delusion. However, through renewed efforts in prayer, the doubts were swept away. "Yesterday," he recorded, "after a long season of darkness and sorrow, it pleased God to manifest his pardoning grace to my soul."[29] Freeborn Garrettson, one of the first native American ministers also witnessed to this "dark night of the soul." He recalled on the night of his conversion as he layed down to rest, "My soul was so happy in God I scarcely wished for sleep; ...."[30] However, the next morning he was plagued by a deep distress.

> The blessed Redeemer left me, or rather, hid his face from me; and I had to wade through deep waters ....I was sinking in deep desperation. O! how powerfully I was harassed by the devil, day and night![31]

These periods of discouragement are not difficult to understand when one considers that such emotional peaks as were realized at the time of conversion could not be humanly sustained or even endured for too long a period. When the emotional level dropped it was quite natural that the early Methodists frequently questioned their own spiritual status. These dark nights, characteristic throughout much of the writings of early American Methodism, seem to be one of the unavoidable by-products of its intense preoccupation with emotional, instantaneous conversions.

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[28] Scott, "The Message of Early American Methodism," The History of American Methodism, I, 298f.

[29] Olin, Life and Letters, I, 45.

[30] Bangs, The Life and Times of Freeborn Garrettson, p. 37.

[31] Ibid., p. 38.

Thomas Morris, in considering these moments of darkness, observed that they would persist in every young Christian until his will is "brought wholly into subjection to the will of God."[32] The early American Methodists never resigned themselves to a life of joys and defeats. There was a more perfect state, viz., Christian perfection. Toward that goal they ever pressed. Freeborn Garrettson expressed the feelings of all of Methodism. "I think I shall never be satisfied," he exclaimed, "until I have a deeper work of grace in my soul."[33] The experience of Nathan Bangs was quite characteristic. After his conversion he reported "much inward comfort, ...but notwithstanding...felt a sense of moral defect." He continued in this state for sometime. However one evening in a period of prayer, his "desire for a pure heart became intense, and [his] faith grew stronger and stronger" and he earnestly prayed for perfect love. When he finished his prayer he experienced a genuine peace.

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[32] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 55.

[33] Bangs, The Life and Times of Freeborn Garrettson, p. 136.

> I sank down into an inexpressible calmness, as lying passive at the feet of God. I felt relieved and comforted, as though I had been cleansed from all my filthiness of the flesh and spirit....I was filled with perfect love.[34]

This occurred some six months after Bangs first experienced saving grace. However, as he observed later, "I did not always retain an evidence of it, nor live in its enjoyment, though whenever I recurred to it, either in conversation, prayer, or preaching, my heart was inflammed with divine love."[35]

While affirming that holiness of heart and life was the teaching of the Scriptures, some of the American Methodists confessed that it was an ideal state which was difficult to maintain in actuality, or even to attain in the first place. On the doctrine of Christian Perfection, Wilbur Fisk wrote:

> I love this doctrine; yet, I confess to my shame, I enjoy less of it than I once did, notwithstanding some have abused and dishonored it, and others despise it; still, I know it to be the doctrine of the Bible, the truth of God and the only doctrine that can save the Church. O that I were inspired with holy zeal to preach it.[36]

Stephen Olin confirmed his sincere belief in the doctrine and his desire for it, but added, "When I ask for the witness that I am now in the enjoyment of this high spiritual state, I feel something like a rebuke."[37] However, he noted, he did enjoy a "sweet repose in Christ." Of this rest he commented:

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[34] Stevens, Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D., p. 58.

[35] Ibid., p. 346.

[36] Holdich, Life of Wilbur Fisk, D.D., p. 143.

[37] Olin, Life and Letters, II, 44.

> I will confess, however, that this general spiritual satisfaction, if I may so speak, is accompanied by a strong wish,...by a wish to possess all that I lack of the fullness of the Gospel, whether that deficiency may consist in a want of deeper experience or a clearer evidence.[38]

It is clear from the autobiographical writings cited above that the inward experience of salvation (conviction, conversion, sanctification), was expressed by American Methodists in subjective terms. Such expressions are indicative of the romantic evangelicalism, which, in part, characterized Methodism during the first half of the nineteenth century. Some parallels between popular romanticism and American Methodism were discussed in the first chapter of this study.[39] Here, it is necessary to comment further on the fact that American Methodism focused on the individual and his emotions. Religion, as stated throughout this study, was viewed as an experienced relationship between God and man, which gave the individual a certain inner dynamic. The concern of Methodism for experimental religion quite naturally brought the emotions to the forefront. The Methodists listened to their emotions. As suggested in the previous chapter, in their effort to effect heart religion, the Methodist preachers made strong appeals to the emotive powers of the individual. While including many of the basic themes of evangelical Christianity in the message, the minister frequently relied upon the descriptive imagery to bring his listeners to a point of decision. The subjective expressions in the autobiographical materials suggest that on the whole the response of the individual to the gospel message was more emotional than intellectual. The man in sin *experienced* a deep agony over his lost condition. Usually after a period of disparaging, the individual *felt* his burden lifted. Some went on to *enjoy* a calm repose in perfect love.

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[38] Ibid.

[39] See chap. 1, pp. 15-26.

The attention which American Methodism directed toward the individual and his emotions tended to encourage a rather introspective type of religious experience. The autobiographical materials abound with references to self-introspection, quite similar to the Puritan practice.[40] Characteristically it included a confession of one's shortcomings and a consequent desire for more of Christ. Freeborn Garrettson, in one period of meditation, confessed that he felt a certain emptiness of spirit, and that he earnestly desired to have more of the Spirit of God in his heart.[41] William McKendree expressed a similar concern:

> I want to serve God will all my soul, and dedicate my gifts and substance to the Lord. But O, I do often see and feel my failures, and set out afresh to ammend; yet have to mourn that I am not what I ought to be![42]

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[40] Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, p. 22.

[41] Bangs, *The Life of Freeborn Garrettson*, p. 275.

[42] Paine, *Life and Times of William McKendree*, I, 93.

In a letter to one of his relatives, Wilbur Fisk wrote of his "ardent desire...to feel more of the blessed effects of the atoning sacrifice in my own soul." His own weakness of spirit prohibited his enjoyment of a fuller life. "Into this state my soul at times presses to enter: till I attain this," he concluded, "I cannot, [and] must not rest."[43]

Obviously American Methodists did not understand Christian experience in terms of a static phenomenon. Theirs was a quest for more of the fullness of the Lord in their lives. It was a life of growing in grace, going on to perfection. "We must go forward," exhorted Aaron Lummus, "grow[ing] in the knowledge and love of God, and thus work out our salvation; or retrograde, lose the light and life of grace, after all we have done and suffered for God, become prey to our enemies, make shipwreck, and fall into perdition."[44] The Methodists stressed that in as much as the individual, in his most inward being, is a spirit, he is capable of spiritual growth as well as intellectual growth. Hence, the preachers of American Methodism urged their listeners to go on to perfection. This should be the constant concern of every Christian. There are no stationary positions. Indeed, as George Peck explained, "We shall never, until we get to heaven, and probably not even then, be able to say, we have reached the summit of excellence and can advance no further."[45] Hence, one must not relax. To settle back is to become more fixed. It becomes "more difficult for us to strike our tents and move onward to greener pastures and more fruitful fields."[46]

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[43] Holdich, Life of Wilbur Fisk, D.D., pp. 121f.

[44] Aaron Lummus, "The Nature and Importance of Growing in Grace," The Methodist Preacher (Buffalo: Derby, Orton, and Mulligan, 1853), p. 324.

The Christian who would grow in grace must make diligent use of the means of grace. Some of the means available to the Christian for his spiritual edification were the public and private worship of God and the sacraments, the Lord's Supper and baptism.[47] The Christian should "use diligently, perseveringly, and believingly, all the means of his appointing," and then trust God for the end result, knowing full well, as Thomas Morris explained, that "though [God] does not bless us for the use of the means, as a matter of merited reward, he delights to bless us in the use of them, for his Son's sake."[48]

For American Methodists, participation in the act of worship, whether private or public, or any other particular means, was not understood as a work of righteousness. Such an exercise was for the individual's edification. Indeed, participation in the means of grace kept one responsive to the will of God. The means of grace, then, fulfilled a very positive role in the life of the American Methodists. The means served to remind the individual that his experienced relationship with God was a matter of grace, and at the same time, afforded an avenue through which the individual could express his inward experience of God. F. Ernest Stoeffler, in his study of evangelical pietism, has underscored the importance of such channels of expression. "The fact is," Stoeffler observed, "that without suitable means to express man's devotion to God, Christianity becomes personally meaningless."[49] Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century American Methodism maintained a certain suspicion of an inordinate emphasis being placed upon particular rites and forms of worship.[50] Methodism in America was particularly "low" church in its acts of worship and hence the rites and forms were de-emphasized. Corporately, the common people of American Methodism expressed their devotion to God through a simple song of praise, a testimonial of their personal experience with Christ, or through participation in the sacraments.

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[45] Peck, The Scripture Doctrine of Christian Perfection, p. 14.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Thomas A. Morris, "Drawing Near to God," The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit, collected and revised by Davis W. Clark, ed. by George Peck (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1848), p. 191.

[48] Ibid.

Throughout the writings of early American Methodism, particular importance is given to private worship. Wilbur Fisk resolved that he would spend at least two hours a day in private devotions. These two hours were to be in addition to the period of family worship and the time spent in preparing his sermons.[51] A substantial part of one's private act of worship was to be devoted to the practice of prayer. In his small book written for the young Christian, Timothy Merritt stated that every Christian should find time for "closet" prayers. He should pray alone two or three times a day. The person who finds it difficult to allocate this much time to private prayers, should, according to Merritt, "take it from his sleep by rising a little earlier, and retiring a little later."[52] Stephen Olin also emphasized the importance of spending time in private prayer. A duty which demands "recollection, calmness, and honest, uninterrupted self-examination" must have its "appropriate seasons." Mere moments of ejaculation are not enough.[53]

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[49] F. Ernest Stoeffler, The Rise of Evangelical Pietism (Leiden: E.V. Brill, 1965), p. 18.

[50] See, for example, Olin, Works, I, 62.

Prayer was described in the traditional terms of communion with God. Abel Stevens, in his sermon, "Prayer, an Outline of an Argument for its Institution," explained that man was made for fellowship with God. In such fellowship resides the source of his moral satisfaction. Prayer, Stevens affirmed, is the means to this end.[54] Prayer is not only the means whereby man may have fellowship with God, but it is also the source of further grace and strength. Stevens remarked, "The supplicating accents of our prayer are authoritative to command for our aid the very attributes of the Deity."[55] It is not that God is insensitive to man prior to any prayer offered by him. Rather, it is the expression of the thoughts on the part of man that places him in a position of being responsive to God.[56]

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[51] Holdich, *Life of Wilbur Fisk, D.D.*, p. 68.

[52] Merritt, *The Convert's Guide and Preacher's Assistant*, p. 169.

[53] Olin, *Works*, I, 392f.

[54] Abel Stevens, "Prayer, an Outline of an Argument for its Institution," *The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit*, collected and revised by Davis W. Clark, ed. by George Peck (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1848), p. 182.

Thomas Morris, in his sermon, "Prayer," notes some simple rules to be followed in these moments of private worship of God. They may be summarized as follows:

> (1) The language should be grave, dignified, but simple so as to express one's wants in the most concise way.
> (2) The prayer should be appropriate to the situation. That is, for example, the sinner should pray for a knowledge of his lost condition.
> (3) The prayer should be marked by sincerity. God is always sincere in his dealings with man, and he will not be mocked.
> (4) One must have a sense of his unworthiness, or humility. For this reason, the most helpful position is kneeling.
> (5) Prayer should be made according to the divine will.
> (6) Prayer should be offered in faith.[57]

The Christian, then, is to be faithful in the use of the means of grace. Diligence in prayer, in the worship of God, etc., on the one hand, enables the Christian to remain sensitive to God and his purpose. At the same time, these practices afford channels through which the Christian receives further grace and strength to accomplish God's purpose in his own life and in the world. Hence, the means of grace, in actuality, are necessary not only to sustain the vitality of the inner experience, but also to prepare one for the life of practical religion in the world.

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[55] Ibid.

[56] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 17.

[57] Ibid., pp. 22ff.

Practical religion represents the second aspect of evangelical Christianity. The living relation between God and man, i.e., inward holiness, issues forth in a life of obedience and love in the world, i.e., outward holiness. Nathan Bangs said it all in these few words, "...wherever this religion exists in the heart, it will show itself in the life;...."[58] Anything less is not true Christianity. "He only is a true Christian," concluded Stephen Olin, "who makes it the business of his life to obtain and to do the utmost good...."[59] John Summerfield concurred in this judgment:

> ...no fruit in the life is a proof that there is no religion in the heart, and all progression of this kind only proves the man to be a religious hypocrite.[60]

American Methodism viewed the importance, and indeed, the necessity of practical religion from a twofold perspective. That is, practical religion was viewed as a necessity for salvation, here and now, and in the future, and also, as fulfilling the implicit design of the divine economy.[61] In respect to the former, American Methodism never intended to suggest that salvation was by works. As stated in the previous chapter, American Methodism continued the Reformation theme of salvation by grace through faith, which had been passed on by John Wesley. When American Methodism stressed the need for works of practical religion, it was but repeating an emphasis voiced by Wesley.

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[58] Bangs, The Present State, Prospects, and Responsibilities of the Methodist Episcopal Church, p. 168.

[59] Olin, Works, I, 291.

[60] Summerfield, Sermons and Sketches of Sermons, p. 92.

[61] The precedent for the twofold emphasis had been established by John Wesley, and also the English Puritans prior to Wesley. See Monk, John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage, pp. 149ff.

> 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord,' shall see the face of God in glory....No, it cannot be done; none shall live with God, but he that now lives to God; none shall enjoy God in heaven, but he that bears the image of God on earth;....[62]

With Wesley, the man who is finally accepted by God is the man who believes in Christ and at the same time, puts that belief to work in love and obedience toward his brother.[63]

Stephen Olin, for one, viewed works in the same general sense, i.e., as secondary, or perhaps, remote conditions of salvation. Olin asserted that the true scriptural doctrine regarding good works may be summed up in two positions: (1) Good works are not grounds of acceptance, and (2) They are measures of reward.[64] Olin went on to affirm that the only ground of acceptance was God's gracious act of acceptance exercised on the account of the atonement. The individual is received through the merit of Christ's death alone, but, he continued, "through this same merit, the acts of obedience and charity are also accepted...[and] become means not only of our growth in grace but of our future happiness."[65] Olin underscored the teaching of the Scriptures which emphasizes that judgment will be brought against "flagrant transgression," but condemnation will also "rest upon those who have a want of piety,...[i.e.,] those who have failed to do good."[66] John Summerfield shared Olin's conviction. "Good works are not meritorious, for all merit must center in God, but they are rewardable when flowing from the evangelical principle. They justify our faith and shall meet a full reward."[67] Or again, Summerfield stated, "Faith working by love,...is the final work which God requires, and that by which he will judge us in righteousness."[68]

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[62] Wesley, Works, X, 364.

[63] Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, p. 150.

[64] Olin, Works, I, 360.

In view of the general emphasis expressed in the above references, one might be tempted to argue that though American Methodism consciously sought to avoid the position, it did, in fact, succumb to the teaching of salvation by works. For a better understanding of American Methodism's view of the relation of faith and works to salvation, it is helpful to note that implied in the preceding references is a Wesleyan distinction between present and final salvation. With respect to present salvation, John Wesley stated that faith is the sole condition. However this faith issues in works of love and faith working by love is the condition of final salvation.

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[65] Ibid., p. 362.

[66] Ibid., p. 371.

[67] Summerfield, Sermons and Sketches of Sermons, p. 92.

[68] Ibid., p. 147.

> With regard to the condition of salvation, it may be remembered that I allow, not only faith, but likewise holiness or universal obedience, to be the ordinary condition of final salvation; and that when I say, Faith alone is the condition of present salvation, what I would assert is this: (1) That without faith no man can be saved from his sins;....And (2) That at what time soever faith is given, holiness commences in the soul.[69]

One thing which Wesley is saying here is that faith by its very nature issues forth in works. The quotations from the American writers cited above rest upon the same conviction. It is simply inconceivable that faith should not express itself in good works. "Faith," wrote John Summerfield, "which unites to Christ draws from its union with him all those graces which shall fill its possessor with every fruit, even to the abounding in every good work."[70] Granting, then, that American Methodism stressed along with Wesley that faith and works are inseparable, it still remains a necessity to determine in what sense Methodism viewed, not only faith, but also works, as the condition of final salvation. Recalling Olin's statement that works are not the ground of acceptance, but the measure of reward, it is clear that Olin, in a characteristic fashion, was seeking to avoid the implication that works are meritorious. Rather, works which issue from faith in actuality witness to that faith and are said to be the condition of reward. It is not that good works lay hold of eternal life, but that the absence of good works may prompt God to withhold his offer of final salvation.[71]

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[69] Quoted by Monk, John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage, p. 123.

[70] Summerfield, Sermons and Sketches of Sermons, p. 147.

Practical religion, in the second place, was written into the very make up of the divine economy for the salvation of mankind. Through the life of love and obedience in the world, the purpose of God for his creation is realized. To use a New Testament expression, American Methodism affirmed that the Christian was called to be "salt" and "light" in the world (Mt. 5:13-16). Or again, the Christian is to be a minister of reconciliation (II Cor. 5:20). "O!" Stephen Olin warned, "we cannot think of ourselves as children of God without recognizing obligations of infinite strength and sacredness to become co-workers with him in saving souls."[72] Wilbur Fisk expressed this same conviction in a somewhat different manner. At one point Fisk confessed that he felt that the Christian church had in effect fallen asleep. He called for a reawakening of its responsibility to the world.

> Would to God that we had some electrifying instrument that would draw from heaven a portion of that celestial fluid that fires the breasts of angels, and shocks simultaneously the whole heavenly host! ....Where is another Benjamin Franklin that will draw down the spiritual fire? Whose faith will pierce the clouds to draw it down?....O, my brother, let us rally a company, and go to work as if we

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[71] See Deschner, Wesley's Christology, p. 179.

[72] Olin, Works, I, 231.

> felt, what is indeed the fact, that a world is at stake![73]

Stephen Olin took great pains to say that every man should actively follow the life of practical religion. While a conviction may be pronounced from the pulpit, it is the man in the pew who must actualize it through his own actions. "Men are wont to bestow but little honor upon a mere theory," observed Olin. "They want to know what it is worth in practice and by that standard they estimate its value."[74] Thomas Morris, underscoring the same theme, remarked that the Christian is ever under the scrutiny of his fellow man who "looks for the fruit of conversion in our manner of living, and this proportionate to our profession."[75] It is in this context that one can fully appreciate Francis Asbury's exhortation regarding personal conduct.

> We must not only not live in the use of unlawful things, but we must also not indulge in the unlawful use of lawful things: it is lawful to eat, but not to gluttony; it is lawful to drink, but not to drunkenness; it is lawful to be married, but it is unlawful for either husband or wife to idolize the other....[76]

Clearly, the language and thought is reminiscent of the Pauline emphasis. American Methodism consciously attempted to establish a moral context conducing to the Christian life, believing that to a large degree, Christianity is caught rather than taught. For, as Olin explained, "The world will believe, not what the pulpit teaches, but what the church lives."[77]

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[73] Holdich, *Life of Wilbur Fisk, D.D.*, p. 242.

[74] Olin, *Works*, I, 223.

[75] Morris, *Sermons on Various Subjects*, p. 304.

[76] Asbury, *The Journal and Letters of Francis Asbury*, III, 186.

American Methodism's understanding of the life of practical religion was marked by this twofold concern: outward religion was viewed as being necessary to one's salvation and at the same time, as fulfilling the purpose of the divine economy. But where must the Christian function? That is, in what areas or spheres does the Christian apply his practical religion? Methodism commonly spoke of two: the home and the world. Laban Clark summarized the Methodist position: "Our works are not to be confined to the closet, but are to be carried out into the domestic and social circles ...."[78]

One of the predominant themes of the writings of early American Methodism was the importance and indeed necessity of family religion. It was the conviction of Methodism that through Christian education and leadership within the family context, succeeding generations could be expected to carry on and advance the cause of Christ.

Methodism in America from time to time has been criticized for its failure to take seriously the importance of Christian nurture. Philip Schaff, writing in the middle of the nineteenth century, judged that Methodists "often dreadfully neglect all religious training of children."[79] C.C. Goen, in his article, "The 'Methodist Age' in American Church History," repeated this rather common criticism of American Methodism.[80] Whether or not this criticism is entirely justifiable is a matter of question. Judging from the numerous references which appear throughout the writings of American Methodism that emphasize the importance of worship and instruction in the home, one must say that Methodism made an honest effort to lead its people toward an understanding of the urgent need of Christian nurture. It would, of course, be difficult to determine to what extent the common man of American Methodism practiced religious instruction in the home. One is forced to rely on what the ministers urged the people to do and accept these exhortations as being indicative of the general concern for Christian nurture among Methodism's leadership.

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[77] Olin, Works, I, 223.

[78] Clark, "The Nature and Design of the Atonement," The Methodist Preacher, p. 293.

In seeking to appraise American Methodism's concern for religious education, one must not overlook the importance which John Wesley attributed to Christian instruction in the home. Robert Monk has noted Wesley's strong commitment to the principle that "through family religion and education...

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[79] Philip Schaff, America: A Sketch of its Political, Social, and Religious Character, ed. by Perry Miller (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1961), p. 143.

[80] Goen, "The 'Methodist Age' in American Church History," Religion in Life, XXXIV (1965), 565. See also Barclay, History of Methodist Missions, Part One, Early American Methodism, II, 407.

God will raise up a new generation to carry on his church and a well-ordered society."[81] To be sure, the presence of a particular emphasis in the writings of John Wesley does not mean necessarily that the same concern was manifest in American Methodism. However, in this particular instance, there are numerous references which demonstrated that American Methodism continued to stress the need for religious instruction in the home. Freeborn Garrettson, upon returning to one of his first preaching stations in Delaware, inquired as to whether or not any of those who were present on that particular evening had been around thirty years before when he had first come into the area. There were none. Garrettson then proceeded in his sermon to emphasize the importance of Christian instruction.

> O my friends, probably all of you will be in eternity before the end of thirty years or more. You see the necessity of training up your children for the church, in order to keep a succession of faithful members,....[82]

Ebenezer Newell, reflecting upon his own spiritual training, expressed gratitude for the fact that his parents had encouraged him in the "spirit of true piety." He admonished his readers: "O Parents, it is you who ought to train up your children in the way they should go."[83] To underscore the urgency of instruction and worship in the family, Newell related a story of a mother who had a strong impression that the family ought to gather for worship. However, because of the demands of the daily schedule, she did not encourage family devotions. One day her husband returned to the house with their eleven year old daughter in his arms. She had been fatally wounded. After the death of their daughter, both husband and wife confessed that they should have heeded the impression to have family worship.[84] Billy Hibbard attributed his first convictions to the fact that his parents had lived out true Christianity in his presence and instructed him in the Christian way.[85] Thomas Morris, preaching on the subject of prayer, used the occasion to urge the congregation to be faithful in the observance of family prayers, "especially [for the sake of] the children, who, after all, are more influenced by example than precept."[86] For Morris, the true Christian simply cannot neglect this aspect of his Christian duty. It is significant to note that the Christian Advocate and Journal, a paper printed from the mid 1820's on for the Methodist home, included one section entitled, "Parents' Department." The content of this column focused upon the parents' responsibility toward the child and his Christian nurture. In the first issue of the Christian Advocate and Journal, for example, the obligation of the parents to instill in their children basic Christian principles was emphasized. The conviction was expressed "that a bias should be given to the young's mind in favour of Christianity."[87] Further, "To fail in this all important duty will mean someday that we will have to give an account of our failure."[88] Or again:

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[81] Monk, John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage, p. 181.

[82] Bangs, The Life of Freeborn Garrettson, p. 212.

[83] Newell, Life and Observations, pp. 9f.

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[84] Ibid., pp. 102f.

[85] Hibbard, Memoirs, p. 17.

[86] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 20.

> ...if we have any regard for the welfare of the future, let us use our utmost endeavors to bring up our children in such a manner that they may bring honour on themselves and on us, and become blessings in and ornaments to society.[89]

The above references, while not exhaustive, are representative of American Methodism's concern for family religion and instruction in the home. With Methodism, however, instruction in the home was not viewed as replacing conversion at the altar. American Methodism throughout this period stressed the need for crisis-type conversion, even for the young.[90] Religious instruction in the home was preparatory to the gracious act of conversion. An early understanding of what is right and what is wrong makes the young person more responsive to the influence of the Spirit of God upon his life.[91] The Methodists well knew that he who has been instructed as a child in the principles of Christian living is more apt to respond to the call of Christ upon his life. Thus, the preachers of American Methodism again and again urged the parents to nurture their children by precept as well as by example.[92]

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[87] Christian Advocate and Journal, I (1826), 4.

[88] Ibid.

[89] Ibid., p. 52.

[90] It was precisely this emphasis which Philip Schaff had in mind when he observed Methodism's general neglect of Christian nurture. They presumed, he noted, "that some exciting revival sermon...will answer the purpose of the tedious process of parental discipline and care...." Schaff, America: A Sketch of its Political, Social, and Religious Character, p. 144.

One area, then, in which the Christian is called to live the life of practical religion is within his own family, in the home. The more broad-based area is the world. The attitude of American Methodism toward the world must be understood from two perspectives. On the one hand, in that the religion which Methodism encouraged was experimental in nature, i.e., it centered on the relationship between God and man, American Methodism tended to withdraw from that which was thought to be worldly. The Methodist minister admonished his listener to focus his attention on the things of God, on those things which were not of the passing order. On the other hand, by a gracious act of God, viz., creation, man has been placed in a physical order, and he must function as a Christian in that order. Indeed, he is held responsible for his actions in the world. He is to be the man whose faith works by love toward God and his fellow man.

American Methodism took to heart the Biblical exhortation to "come out from [the world], and be separate...." (II Cor. 6:17). The Christian was expected to maintain a certain detachment, a certain separateness from the world. In a letter written to his sister, Wilbur Fisk stated that "there is no other way to enjoy religion but by separation from the world, by watching over your words and your ways ...."[93] The separation which American Methodism encouraged was, of course, not the asceticism of the monastery. Rather, it was, in part, a rational asceticism, an attitude of the mind. The Christian must live in the world and there carry out the normal routines of every day living. In fulfilling the normal functions of life, it is necessary for the Christian to use that which is material, or this worldly. However, he must never allow the material to use him. He must not become overly attached to that which is this worldly.[94] The Christian, to paraphrase a Pauline expression, is called to live in the world as one who has, and yet, has not. He must view the material world with "weaned affection."[95] Nathan Bangs explained the Christian view of the temporal goods as follows:

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[91] Christian Advocate and Journal, I (1826), 13.

[92] This was the theme emphasized through a sermon by Thomas Morris, entitled, "Early Piety." See Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, pp. 11ff.

> There is no sin in riches, any more than there is virtue in poverty....The sin consists in so setting

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[93] Holdich, Life of Wilbur Fisk, D.D., p. 80.

[94] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 304.

[95] The Puritan divines exhorted the people to face the material world with "weaned affection." They were to be completely in the world, but not of it. Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, p. 42.

> our hearts upon them to make them our gods, or our chief good,...in using them, or rather in abusing them, as instruments for selfish, luxurious, and sensual purposes.[96]

Bangs concluded that the Christian must face the material world with "sanctified affections."[97]

There was a second characteristic of Methodism's concern for separateness from the world. This separation was not merely an attitude of the mind, but also, a pattern of practice. James Finley recalled staying with Francis Asbury in a home where Asbury had frequently visited over the years. Finley recorded that Asbury expressed his concern over the increasing worldliness which had come over the household. In Asbury's judgment, each generation had become more secularized. The fourth generation, represented by a "fashionable young girl," had learned to play rather gay music on the piano. In a moment of reflection which was prompted by the above situation, Finley commented:

> The first Methodists were a peculiar people in their personal appearance and manners, and could be distinguished from the world at a single glance. Their self-denial led them to the abandonment of all the lusts of the flesh. They were single-hearted, single-eyed, humble and devoted followers of the Savior.[98]

Nathan Bangs observed that before he was a Methodist he "dressed in the highest fashion of the day," taking pride in the "ruffles on the shirt...[and] long hair in a cue...." When he joined the Methodists he had both the ruffles and the cue removed.[99] Peter Cartwright, commenting on the revivals which he witnessed in mid-America, noted that many gave up the excesses of dress, jewelry and the like.

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[96] Bangs, The Present State, Prospects, and Responsibilities of the Methodist Episcopal Church, p. 225.

[97] Ibid., p. 228.

[98] Finley, Autobiography, p. 276.

> ...there is a solemn conviction in all minds that fashionable frivolities are all contrary to the humble spirit of our Savior;...idolatry is dreadfully deceptive, and we must remember that no idolater hath any inheritance in the Kingdom of God. Let the Methodists take care.[100]

Thomas Morris exhorted the Methodists to avoid such needless forms of recreation as barbecues, ball games, and circuses. Further, a person should not seek to enhance one's own appearance with ornamental objects and fine dress.[101]

There were, according to the American Methodists, just reasons for this negative attitude toward the activities and adornments of the secular world. In general, concern for the material world tends to dull and threaten one's spiritual sensitivity. As Abel Stevens explained, the preachers of early American Methodism felt that such "sins as dancing and card playing, and many other light-hearted activities...." were not conducive to the life of faith and obedience to God.[102] To be more specific, attachment to the patterns of the secular world indicated, for the Methodists, a failure to take seriously the fact that every man is a steward of that which has been given him. A good steward is one who uses his money and time wisely, in accord with the purposes of God. The necessity of being a faithful steward of possessions was an often repeated theme in the writings of American Methodists. Thomas Morris asserted that as a steward of material possessions, one cannot afford to take that which belongs to God and spend on frivolous objects of adornment.[103] An article in the Christian Advocate and Journal also emphasized the importance of the proper use of money.

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[99] Stevens, _Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D._, p. 47.

[100] Cartwright, _The Autobiography of Peter Cartwright,_ p. 78.

[101] Morris, _Sermons on Various Subjects_, pp. 198ff.

[102] Stevens, _Life and Times of Nathan Bangs, D.D._, p. 28.

> Frequent and expensive changes of dress greatly tend to chill the...feeling of charity, foster pride, waste the purse, and prove a bad example to others,....Those that lavish money on dress demonstrate that they are greatly deficient of those excellencies within which, to intelligent and seriously inquisitive minds, appear of inestimable price.[104]

John Bangs surmised that if all the money that was spent each year on costly apparel, worn by the members of the Methodist Church, was put into a fund, the interest would make all the poor of the church quite comfortable.[105] American Methodism, with equal fervor, stressed that the Christian must use his time in the way most in keeping with the purpose of God. Participation in light activities were seen as a misuse of time.[106] In an article which appeared in the Christian Advocate and Journal, there was included a list of reasons why a Christian should not attend the theater. One of the prime reasons given was that a Christian's time could be spent to greater advantage.

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[103] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 199.

[104] Christian Advocate and Journal, II (1827), 9.

[105] Bangs, Autobiography of Rev. John Bangs of the New York Annual Conference, p. 71.

> ...time may be better employed. Time is an invaluable talent. And can we set so little by it, and have so small a sense of our responsibility to God, as to squander it away?[107]

"Religion," John Emory explained in a letter to his sister," requires us, first, never to be idle or unemployed, secondly, never to be triflingly or uselessly employed; but, thirdly, always to be well and profitably employed."[108] The schedule which Wilbur Fisk established early in his ministry affords a further illustration of the importance which the American Methodists attributed to the proper use of time.

> (1) I am resolved,...to retire at nine and rise at five.
> (2) I will appropriate one hour to my morning devotions.
> (3) I will allow one hour for breakfast, family devotions, and such incidental circumstances as may demand my attention.
> (4) I will write each day two hours.
> (5) I will be two hours in some regular scientific or literary study,...
> (6) I will spend one hour in miscellaneous reading.
> (7) One hour for my devotions at noon.
> (8) One hour for dinner.
> (9) One hour for preparing my discourses for the

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[106] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 198.

[107] Christian Advocate and Journal, I (1826), 36.

[108] Robert Emory, The Life of John Emory, D.D., By His Eldest Son (New York: George Lane, 1841), p. 35.

Sabbath.
(10) The remainder of the day will be generally devoted to visiting.[109]

Clearly, the American Methodists sought to be stewards of their possessions and their time. Faithfulness in these areas demanded a certain detachment from the world.

The emphasis upon a certain separateness from the world was certainly not unique to early American Methodism. John Wesley had embraced the same attitude, and, it seems, set a precedent for Methodism in America. Yet certain affinities with the Puritan themes suggest that the Puritan influence must not be overlooked. Of course, in part, these similarities had come to American Methodism through Wesley who was deeply indebted to Puritan life and thought.[110] However, it must be kept in mind that the predominant influence in America until the nineteenth century was the Puritan.[111] While American Methodism was at the forefront of a general shift away from many of the theological presuppositions of Puritan thought, Methodism, along with a great segment of the religious community continued to be influenced by many of the habitual patterns of living which were characteristic of Puritanism in America.[112]

In sharp contrast to the preceding emphasis upon the necessity of the Christian to maintain a certain degree of separation from the world, was the equal stress upon the responsibility of the Christian to his social context. One cannot fully appreciate the attitude of American Methodism toward the world apart from this latter emphasis. Perry Miller remarked, concerning seventeenth century New England Puritanism, that denunciations by the New England divines of worldly patterns did not represent a call for the ascetic life. Rather, for the Puritans, man must live and serve in the world where he was placed.[113] Likewise, John Wesley never intended for the Christian to live in a cloistered world. "Christianity is essentially a social religion," he stated. "It cannot subsist at all without society, without living and conversing with other men."[114] Early American Methodism continued this same theme.

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[109] Holdich, Life of Wilbur Fisk, D.D., p. 68.

[110] Monk, John Wesley: His Puritan Heritage, pp. 227ff.

[111] Hudson, Religion in America, pp. 7f.

[112] Ibid., pp. 9f.

The extent to which the thought of American Methodism reflected or did not reflect a social consciousness has been a frequently discussed topic. The American Methodists accepted as their calling the reforming of a nation. There is evidence to the effect that Methodism, in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, understood its mission primarily in terms of the individual and his spiritual welfare. At the Christmas Conference of 1784, the question was asked: "What may we reasonably believe to be God's

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[113] Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, p. 40.

[114] Wesley, Sermons, I, 382.

Design in raising up the Preachers called Methodists?" The answer: "To reform the continent, and to spread scriptural holiness over these lands." Sidney E. Mead, in his excellent article on "The Rise of the Evangelical Conception of the Ministry in America: 1607-1850," noted a shift in emphasis from the time of the Christmas Conference to the days of Bishop McKendree. Mead observed:

> Whatever was meant by the two phrases, it seems clear that some distinction was intended between reforming the nation _and_ spreading 'scriptural holiness.' But thirty-two years later, such distinctions had so faded that Bishop McKendree could answer that 'God's design in raising up the preachers called Methodists in America was to reform the continent _by_ spreading scriptural holiness over the land.' By that time the basic conviction was that 'if man's soul was saved, fundamental social change would inevitably follow.' In brief, the securing of 'conversions' plus, it should be added, 'the perfecting of the saints,' was equated with, or took the place of, responsibility for society.[115]

C.C. Goen sees the emphasis upon the redemption of society through the restoration of the individual as being in opposition to the social gospel.[116] Without commenting on Goen's appraisal at this juncture, it must be stated that this notion, i.e., the saved soul will save society, represents but a further manifestation of the popular romantic ideals characteristic of early American Methodism. Methodism marched across America preaching to the individual a rather simple gospel of love, which, it felt, could transform not only the individual but the land, if only the individual lived a life of obedience in the world. As Winthrop Hudson explained, "The Christian society was not one of 'wholesome laws' designed to conform the overruling government of God [as in Calvin's Geneva, and to a lesser degree in Puritan New England] but a nation blessed by the harmony of converted individuals."[117] The individual, restored to his proper relationship to God, was expected to live the life of practical religion in the world and so bring out reform in the land.

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[115] Sidney E. Mead, "The Rise of the Evangelical Conception of the Ministry in America: 1607-1850," _The Ministry in Historical Perspective_, ed. by H. Richard Niebuhr and Daniel D. Williams (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), p. 224.

[116] Goen, "The 'Methodist Age' in American Church History," _Religion in Life_, XXXIV (1965), 566.

Accepting the fact that American Methodism during the first part of the nineteenth century focused primarily upon individual salvation, this emphasis does not necessarily preclude a social responsibility. H. Richard Niebuhr, in his work, The Kingdom of God in America, warned, "It is a mistake to regard the individualistic vision of the end and the individualistic hope as detrimental to the sense of social responsibility."[118] While there was no attempt to work out a social gospel philosophy within American Methodism during this period, it does not follow that there were not social implications in the evangelical message of early American Methodism. Paul Shilling offered a helpful summary of the theological implications present in the evangelical message of Methodism. They are summarized as follows:

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[117] Hudson, American Protestantism, p. 73.

[118] H. Richard Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America (New York: Harper and Row, 1937), pp. 129f.

> (1) God has acted to redeem all men. We are therefore called upon to love all men and to seek their highest spiritual and material welfare. No individual stands without the circle of Christian responsibility.
> (2) Salvation is realized in proportion to the faith by which it is realized [and] is expressed in love. The witness of the Spirit is confirmed by the fruits of the Spirit. He who really trusts in Christ for his redemption is marked by an inward and outward holiness.
> (3) Salvation throughout is ethical, is fulfilled in the Christlike character.
> (4) Salvation is not only future but relates to the life of men here and now - relating concretely to the way in which one conducts himself in the presence of his fellow man.
> (5) Salvation relates to the whole of life. When this is rightly understood, it means stewardship.
> (6) Salvation is to be realized in a community.[119]

While Shilling was writing of the Wesleyan tradition as a whole, it is not difficult to see that this summary is equally applicable to American Methodism. The themes which are present in the above summary have been discussed throughout this study.

The evangelical message of Methodism, quite clearly, did include social ramifications. At the same time, as the century progressed through the fourth and fifth decades, there was an increasing number of explicit references regarding the responsibility of the Christian to his social context. Thomas Morris, who advocated a certain detachment from the world, at the same time urged the involvement of the Christian in the world. "Whosoever," Morris observed, "does not labor or follow some useful employment, which contributes to the good of the whole, is a burden to society; and unless he be excused by age, informity, or affliction,...is a sinner against God and man...."[120] An excellent expression of social concern appears in Clarke's sermon, "The Nature, Condition, and Destiny of Man,"

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[119] Paul S. Shilling, Methodism and Society in Theological Perspective (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1960), pp. 59ff.

> No man can fulfill his destination in this life who lives to himself alone. He must live chiefly for the good of others; to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, administer consolation to the sick and the suffering, and bring back the wanderer to the path of truth, duty, and peace. This is clearly indicated by his social constitution and the gospel inspires an universal benevolence: 'Love thy neighbor as thyself.'[121]

In his sermon, "Christian Discipline," Elias Bowen emphasized that man is a social character with social responsibilities.

> Society is a divine institution, the obligations of which are binding upon all its members: and as God has impressed upon us a social character, placing us in a society for the purpose of natural oversight and improvement, it is far from being optional with us whether we will take up a labor with the offending brother or not.[122]

One of the better expressions and illustrations of American Methodism's growing social awareness is to be found in the writings of Stephen Olin. Olin stated the Christian responsibility to be that of diminishing the ills and multiplying the enjoyments of one's fellow man.

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[120] Morris, Sermons on Various Subjects, p. 220.

[121] Clarke, "The Nature, Condition, and Destiny of Man," The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit, p. 54.

[122] Elias Bowen, "Christian Discipline," The Methodist Episcopal Pulpit, collected and revised by Davis W. Clark, ed. by George Peck (New York: Lane and Tippett, 1848), p. 54.

> If we are strong and others are weak, we must protect. If rich, we must succor the poor, if wise, we must instruct the ignorant. We must impart our discoveries, diffuse our light, till all within the sphere of our influence be made partakers of whatever is excellent...in our entire civilization.[123]

Anything less than this is inhumane and unchristian. Olin continued:

> The wretch who should monopolize the bread in a starving city, or refuse to send his boat to the rescue of the passengers and crew of a sinking ship, is neither more cruel nor more guilty than they who look with indifference upon the moral degradation of their fellow man, and withhold the antidote for moral and social maladies....[124]

A number of references have been included here to illustrate American Methodism's social consciousness which became more explicit in the fourth and fifth decades. It would be wrong to assume from these quotations that American Methodism at this point in time was spearheading the way in awakening the social consciousness of the Christian community. On the other hand, the disparagement of early American Methodism for its lack of social awareness[125] represents a failure to take into account the social implications inherent in its evangelical message. Further, it reflects a disregard for those sources that appeared later in the first half of the century which reveal an explicit awareness of the Christian responsibility to the world both in terms of the spiritual and material.

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[123] Olin, Works, I, 122.

[124] Ibid., p. 123.

[125] See, e.g., Goen, "The 'Methodist Age' in American Church History," Religion in Life, XXXIV (1965), 566.

In this chapter attention has focused on American Methodism's understanding of evangelical religion. True Christianity is comprised of inward and outward religion. The content of this chapter has been experiential and practical. The normative or theological content, on the whole, was of secondary significance. Various influences united to shape Methodism's view of the inward and outward life. American Methodism of course was deeply indebted to John Wesley. Puritan influences in both the positive and negative sense were also critical. Further, it has been suggested that American Methodism reflected some of the characteristics of the popular romantic spirit of the first half of the nineteenth century. American Methodism's focus on the individual and his emotions, its loving adoration of Jesus, the Savior of men, its simple gospel of love which could reform the land, all reflect that romantic mood which was prevalent in America during the first part of the nineteenth century.[126]

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[126] Gabriel, The Course of American Democratic Thought, p. 34.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study an effort has been made to examine and interpret the general character or mind of early American Methodism. This examination has been guided by the conviction that a given movement cannot be fully understood or appreciated apart from an awareness of the context in which it thrives. Religious movements do not rise and develop in vacuums. Rather, they reflect, in a sense, a dialogue with the life and thought of a particular period. To this dialogue, or encounter, a specific religious movement brings certain basic emphases from its own tradition to which it remains indebted. Concurrently, the context may serve to condition the movement in one way or another.

During the first half of the nineteenth century, there was within American Methodism a growing awareness of the various theological positions which were being expressed within the religious community. A significant number of American Methodists, judging that some of the basic essentials of the evangelical message were being threatened, placed themselves in the arena of theological debate. Throughout the discussions there is reflected in the writings of the American Methodists a basic commitment to and dependence on their Wesleyan heritage. Indeed, they drew heavily from it. While the American Methodists during this period purposed to protect and promulgate the basic themes of the Wesleyan message, they may have emphasized one theme more than another, or perhaps modified a Wesleyan emphasis, or even distinguished their position from John Wesley. An emphasis of one theme and not another, a modification, a distinction, these must be understood, in part, as outgrowths of Methodism's debate with the theological community. It has been suggested that prevenient grace became the watchword of American Methodism. To be sure, Wesley had introduced the concept of prevenient grace in his own theology. With American Methodism, particularly in its polemical writings, prevenient grace or gracious ability was called upon again and again to save the Methodist position from the pitfalls which were judged as being inherent in traditional Calvinism as well as in Nathaniel Taylor's New Haven school. It is worth noting that other Wesleyan themes, such as Christian perfection, did not receive widespread attention in the sense of formal explication during this period. One can see a modification of a Wesleyan concept in American Methodism's understanding of the atonement. Both Cannon[1] and Williams[2] agree that Wesley gave specific expression to the Anselmic view of the atonement. Sin, as a violation of the law of God, deserves infinite punishment. Christ's death is an appeasement to an angry and offended God.[3] While there were references to God as the Governor who must protect his government, the Anselmic view was dominant in the thought of Wesley. With American Methodism, there was a conscious effort to interweave a modified Anselmic view with the governmental view. The death of Christ was no longer viewed as necessary to appease the wrath of God. Rather, it was understood as being consistent with and meeting the demands of the internal principles of the divine nature. Further, in that the world represents an outward expression of the divine nature, sin cannot be tolerated in the moral government and must therefore be punished. That God should take this punishment upon himself in the person of his Son, Jesus Christ, represents the most complete revelation of his love for mankind. The emphasis, characteristic of American Methodism, reflects an awareness of the criticism of liberal theology against the traditional Anselmic view, and also a relationship to the transition in the Edwardean school toward a governmental view of the atonement. It may also be seen as a bridge between Wesley's position and the governmental view of the atonement as developed by John Miley during the second half of the nineteenth century.[4] A significant number of American Methodists distinguished themselves from Wesley with respect to the question of depravity and demerit. Wesley seemed to affirm that, because of Adam's sin, man had received native depravity and native demerit. This position was particularly characteristic of traditional Calvinism. The Methodist writers in America shared with Nathaniel Taylor the conviction that the idea of imputed guilt was an affront to the character of God and counter to the concept of man as a free moral agent. Hence, they affirmed that Adam's sin brought upon all native depravity but not native demerit. At this point, some of the leading spokesmen in American Methodism, Bangs, Fisk, Shinn, *et al*., set apart their position from Wesley and anticipated an emphasis more common in the second half of the century.[5]

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[1] Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, p. 209.

[2] Williams, John Wesley's Theology Today, p. 83.

[3] Cannon, The Theology of John Wesley, p. 208.

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[4] Chiles, Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935, pp. 166ff.

It has been observed that the debates in which Methodism engaged were prompted by its pragmatic concern for the evangelical truths of the Wesleyan message. In these discussions, the polemical character of American Methodism expressed itself. However, the Methodists on the whole viewed themselves first of all as men called to preach the plain truths of the Christian faith. When they judged that these truths were being threatened, they turned, then, to polemics.

The themes discussed in the various theological debates were considered to be basic to the evangelical message of Christianity. American Methodism, in presenting its message, repeated in substance the emphases of the Wesleyan tradition. The one point at which American Methodism seemingly went beyond Wesley was not in respect to substance, but in the matter of explication. While meticulous analysis was not the primary concern of Methodist preaching, there were instances where the Methodists attempted more than the statement of the plain truths. This was particularly the case with respect to their descriptions of man's plight in sin and his recovery through redeeming grace. In these instances, American Methodism employed the schema of faculty psychology more so than Wesley. American Methodism's use of faculty psychology to describe native depravity and regeneration reveals a clear relationship to the patterns followed by the Puritan divines of New England.[6]

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[5] *Ibid*., pp. 131ff.

In the sermons of this period, particularly those which appeared in print in the third and fourth decades, the basic essentials of the Christian faith were set forth. However, the Methodist minister was not content simply to present the truths. He must seek a response. The sermon was viewed as the prime means instituted by God for effecting a religion of the heart. When American Methodism focused its attention on heart religion, its romantic character tended to come to expression. To the American scene Methodism brought its message of the warm heart. Many of the emphases in the Wesleyan message were shared by the popular romantic spirit characteristic of America during the first half of the nineteenth century. Because of this common meeting ground, the romantic tendencies, implicit in the Wesleyan understanding of religious experience, received new fervor in America. At the same time, Methodism, by its appeal to the individual and his emotions, tended to sustain the popular romantic spirit of the day. Methodism's description of heart religion, as would be expected, was quite subjective. The normative content was of secondary significance. They spoke in terms of feeling shackled in sin, of experiencing their burden lifted, and of adoring the blessed Savior.

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[6] See Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century, chap. ix.

For American Methodism true religion was never understood simply in terms of an inward experience. It always manifests itself in practical religion. The latter emphasis, with all of its implications, has not always been fully appreciated. Methodism has frequently been criticized for its lack of social consciousness. It is true that one does not find in early American Methodism a social gospel emphasis as was prominent in the second part of the nineteenth century. However, one must not fail to take into account the social ramifications which are implicit in Methodism's evangelical message. One further criticism must be briefly considered. Students of American religion have stated that Methodism neglected Christian nurture. A careful study of the literature reveals that, while Methodism during this period continued to emphasize child conversion, Christian instruction was viewed as preparatory to conversion.

American Methodism during the first half of the nineteenth century was marked by its twofold character. Religion was described as the religion of the heart. It is that which the individual experiences and feels. However, religion is more than feeling. While American Methodism directed its primary concern toward the religion of the heart, it emphasized that such religion must be grounded upon knowledge. Methodism did not abrogate the religion of the head. This dual emphasis upon the religion of head and heart was characteristic of John Wesley's thought and the whole of evangelical religion. However, within American Methodism during the period under study, each aspect was enlivened by its new social and theological environment. When faced with a new theological community, Methodism's concern for the normative content of evangelical Christianity expressed itself polemically. As Methodism rubbed shoulders with its new social environment, it tended to speak romantically, i.e., in the language of experience. Throughout this period American Methodism remained committed to evangelical religion which seeks to reconcile the polemic and the romantic, the head and heart. This was the aim of American Methodism. It sought to effect in the individual an experienced relationship with God in Jesus Christ. Such a relationship comes to expression when that which is understood in the mind is felt in the heart. Or, to use the words of H. Richard Niebuhr, the Christian is "one who sees the excellency and the beauty of God in Christ and so loves him with all his heart for his sake alone."[7]

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[7] Niebuhr, The Kingdom of God in America, p. 112. This emphasis is clearly reflected in Methodism's understanding of saving faith. See chap. iii, pp. 128ff. of the present study.